The Newsroom Brain

A Working Guide to Journalism Decisions

NMC

EXECUTIVE EDUCATION

RESEARCH AND PARTNERSHIPS

NORTHWESTERN UNIVERSITY

J.L. Kellogg Graduate School of Management

Medill School of Journalism

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About The Newsroom Brain

This publication is one in a series from the Editorial Leadership Initiative, a three-year project of NMC, Northwestern University's media management center. ELI works to improve the management skills of newspaper editors by helping them recognize trends in their communities and newsrooms while cultivating the skills they will need to prepare for the future.
In setting up the work of ELI, the editors interviewed dozens of newspaper editors and publishers either one-on-one or in focus groups. We also heard from the many participants in NMC's executive seminars. While the questions from non-editors came from different sources, they seemed to be asking a familiar question: How does the `newsroom brain' function? That is, if editors know they are going to offend or anger readers, why do they do it anyway? Editors, weary from the blank stares they get when they explain a decision, asked for help in telling their story. This is a first attempt.
The Newsroom Brain is designed to help editors articulate and educate non-newsroom staff about basic journalism ethics and decision-making processes. We hope you will find it to be a great way to get newsroom and non-newsroom staffers talking about ethics and values using real-life scenarios.

Michael P. Smith, Director, ELI
Stacy Lynch, Project Manager, ELI

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Forward

By Richard Schwarzlose, Ph.D.
Professor, Medill School of Journalism

Reporters and editors are looking for answers to the growing number of ethical dilemmas they encounter every day. Increasingly, however, journalists are realizing that while codes of ethics provide broad principles for newsrooms, when journalists face a reporting dilemma, answers that work come from thoughtful discussion among reporters and editors within the newsroom.

The scenarios in this publication provide opportunities for you to explore the dimensions of news dilemmas and to discuss ways of deciding how to handle the issues they raise.

The goal of such discussion is to make you more alert to possible ethical problems as they develop in the newsroom and to give you practice in decision-making based on thoughtful discussions of the problems of your newsroom colleagues. Good luck.

The Inherent Conflicts in Ethics

By Michael P. Smith
Director, Editorial Leadership Initiative
NMC, Northwestern University

This is how easily it happens: After working eight straight Friday nights and 27 consecutive days without a break, the managing editor decides to take off early for along weekend getaway. The news editor sneaks off early to catch her daughter's solo with the marching band. There is no major news. Things are extremely

The wire editor shows up after the dinner break with a national report on the ease and success of buying used cars via the Internet.'Despitelower-than-avera -ge Internet household penetration in the area, computer use is growing. A few editors gather around and brainstorm about how they can make the presentation interesting and liven up the news report. "What if we have an illustration that depicts everything wrong with buying a used car in person?" someone asks innocently. The immediate group consensus is that it is a great idea, and the artist runs to the files to find illustrations from local auto dealers to serve as the basis for an illustration that can be assembled on her Mac screen. By the time the paper lands on the publisher's doorstep on Saturday morning, the telephone has already rung twice. Local dealers, outraged at being

well-planned for the weekend and Monday papers. The assistant news editor, who was a star in the sports department with spectacular centerpiece packages, is left in charge. Their parting words were: "We need something to liven up this news report:

depicted as sleazy, plaid-draped con men, are furious that their local newspaper would suggest that customers bypass them to buy cars from unknown sources on the World Wide Web. The usual ad boycott and apologies follow.

1 The events described here are real. The situation has been slightly altered to protect the identity of the newspaper.

In relating this incident months later, the editor observed: "It's never the big things that trip us up; it is the little things..." Such is the case with ethical decision-making in newspapers. The big issues are obvious and there are all kinds of safeguards and legal assistance in place. The little things, the decisions made by beat reporters and frontline editors during the routine of their jobs, create many of the ethical problems faced by editors today. These are the problems that drive non-journalists to frustration. Frequently they ask: What were they thinking? Are they on automatic pilot? Don't they look at this stuff before they put it in the newspaper? The editors often come up with a set of responses. No one ever seems satisfied -tough decisions are rarely satisfying.

Investigate any of these cases and you will find that a framework for ethical decision making is in place. Many newspapers have published codes of ethics; most professional organizations have them too.' Many journalism schools teach ethics in separate classes and integrate ethics throughout other classes. By the time you are a reporter at a newspaper, ethics are pounded into you daily. Even if they are not referred to explicitly in conversations between reporters and editors, they are implied in the types of questions being asked -journalistic shorthand for getting at the ethical considerations. At the foundation of most journalistic codes of ethics are three basic principles: 1) Tell the truth, 2) Act to minimize harm and 3) Maintain independence. They are listed in this order because gut and experience—not academic or scientific research—tell us that they are considered and weighted in this order by working professionals. The community, the readers of the newspaper, would also say that No. 2 doesn't seem to matter to journalists as much as the others.

These basic principles guide most journalistic thinking today. They also cause great internal conflict. They point to a decision: Publish the story or don't.

You can see how telling the truth about the ease of buying used cars over the Internet actually caused harm to local used car salesmen. Younger reporters believe that facts are truth; that telling two sides of a story gets to a greater truth. Yet the public often understands that the real truth on an issue may not come by juxtaposing two extremes; it may be somewhere in the gray area of personal experience. Even when truth itself is not

harmful, it is often elusive and temporal. What appears to be true today may not be true next year.

Many editors are experimenting with ways to help reporters get at the greater truth today. In effect, they are creating a new journalistic shorthand in their conversations with reporters. Sit in on this conversation and you may hear these questions: What is the main thing driving this story and how did it come about? How do you provide context or meaning? Do the facts reflect the wholeness of the story? All of these questions are aimed at getting at a more complete truth that may actually act to minimize harm.

It would surprise some newspaper readers that journalists have a code of ethics that includes consideration of the feelings of individuals, whether they are sources or victims. Even though it is not universally embraced in newsrooms, the concept exists. Sometimes, an editor will call a family member of a slain victim and tell them about a photo that the newspaper is considering publishing. Occasionally, the editor will write a memo to readers asking for feedback on certain sticky decisions. The concept of not causing harm conflicts with the need to preserve independence. In the new journalistic shorthand, the conversation between editor and reporter will probably use the word "frame," as in "is there another way to frame this story?" If that question had been asked of our friends in the opening scenario, it might have produced a story about local dealers who are using the Internet to sell used cars, the advantages and disadvantages of buying over the Internet, or how used car sales reps deal with their persistent negative image.

At the heart of acting to minimize harm is the idea that journalists need to treat sources and subjects with respect. In the Society of Professional Journalists' Code of Ethics, this includes showing "compassion for those who may be affected adversely by news coverage. Use special sensitivity when dealing with children and inexperienced sources or subjects. Be sensitive when seeking or using interviews or photographs of those affected by tragedy or grief. Recognize that gathering and reporting information may cause harm or discomfort. Pursuit of the news is not a license for arrogance:" The code also describes privacy and taste behaviors. Combined, the various aspects of the code describe what may be called good citizenship.

Basic principle No. 3—maintain independence—conflicts with the idea of citizenship. In some newsrooms today, the idea of remaining distant from the community is being challenged by the activities of public or civic journalism. These activities ask the journalist to think of the viability or the civic health of the community when framing and reporting stories. It is controversial because it challenges the principle of independence. Can a newspaper objectively cover a community while at the same time working to solve civic problems? In the past, the independence principle may have been applied to activities that might compromise, or seem to compromise, a reporter's ability to act objectively—whether the sports editor should coach his daughter's little league team; whether the movie critic should take a junket to interview the star of a forthcoming movie; whether the state editor should march in the local gay-rights parade.

In the past, emphasis on independence was used to make sure people were doing things right. Today some argue that independence prevents newsrooms from understanding their communities, not only from doing things right but also from doing the right thing. This may mean lowering some of the walls between the newsroom and the community. The debate rages and it will not be settled here, partly because there is no one "right" answer to the ethical dilemma.

A personal aside proves this point. Even with rules, it is not always clear which of the tenets should prevail. Even if they appear to be absolute, they are no consolation for difficult decisions. One such decision that I still find troublesome evolved over five years. I've slightly changed the situation and simplified it for illustration.

In 1980, a reporter came to me with what was then the story of the first AIDS victim in town—a young man who had been living in San Francisco returned home because he was ill. In his hospital room, he told the reporter his life story. He had agreed to tell the story if the reporter would not disclose his name because his family did not know he was gay. In the room with him as he told the story was his partner. It was a sad and poignant story about the devastation of AIDS. Despite very strong personal convictions against anonymity and not naming the source, I agreed to let the reporter write the story without using the young man's name. Five years later, the same reporter came to me with a story

idea—the AIDS quilt was coming to town. She visited the site of the quilt and discovered a patch with the young man's name on it. He had succumbed to the disease two years earlier. She returned to the office and wrote a story about the young man, mentioning her earlier story. This time she intended to name the young man. The victim's partner and parents pleaded with us not to name the man—his relatives and neighbors never knew that he was gay and they wanted to keep it that way. We explained that putting his name on the quilt was parallel to publishing it. We published. This was a situation in which telling the truth superceded the minimization of harm. In retrospect, I'm not too sure what purpose telling the truth served other than to cause discomfort to the family. In today's conversations, the questions I would ask would be about framing—is there another way to tell this story?

As this anecdote shows, there are inherent conflicts in ethical decision-making. They are conflicts journalists face dozens of times a day. It is a muddy field they play on. To cope, many editors have followed a simple framework: They have declared "red flag" topics. These are topics that the editor wants to know about or wants further discussion on before they get into print. They put it in writing.' Expected behaviors are communicated. And they put it into practice. "The Newsroom Brain" is their story. In this scenario form, it attempts to show the decisions many editors face each day and how they deal with the inherent conflicts.

This publication is meant to be a conversation starter, not the final word. Copy it. Share it. Discuss it. It is designed so that scenarios are set up by a discussion of the ethical landscape; the scenarios are followed by editors discussing an outcome. The scenarios represent real events and real decisions that newspaper editors had to make. They intentionally do not represent landmark cases because the editors wanted to be able to illustrate that even routine stories are filled with tough decisions. Even though some of these cases may remind you of actual events, make no assumptions about them. Try not to base your decisions on decisions made in the past. Base your decision on what is presented only in the scenario.

4 Some news organizations, fearing legal ramifications, do not allow newsrooms to publish codes of ethics. In that case, the editors suggest putting it in spoken words, then putting it into practice.

Resist the urge to page past the scenarios to the section on "How Editors Really Handle It" until you have reached a decision and discussed the scenario. Let us know how they work and how you used this publication.

Michael P, Smith is managing director of NMC and director of the Editorial Leadership Initiative.

The Ethical Landscape

Life In The Newsroom

Independence of the Newsroom

Fairness / Credibility

Respecting / Reflecting Community Values

Photojournalism Ethics

The Ethical Landscape

Life in the Newsroom

The following article is reprinted with permission from* The Arizona Republic. *It is intended to represent a typical day in a newspaper newsroom.

On Dec. 8, 1996, Richard de Uriarte, the reader advocate for The Arizona Republic, offered to open his newsroom's doors and put its decision-making up for inspection. It offers a peek into the ways that newsrooms make decisions and the values at stake.

Executive News Editor Don Nicolson fidgeted in his chair. "I'm concerned about (Page) A1 art;' he told the other staffers at Tuesday's 4 p.m. newsroom meeting. He thought that the planned protest against the term "squaw" might have possibilities.

"There's a lot of interest in this story;" he told the others. And photographer Michael Chow had taken some shots of the signs protesters planned to put up throughout Squaw Peak Park and along Squaw Peak Parkway this weekend. The story could be the front-page lead story.

Assistant Metro Editor Venita Hawthorne James had a few reservations.

"My ambivalence is that people say they are going to do something (erect 500 signs);" she said. "I'd rather see if they do it:'

But by late Tuesday afternoon, there were only a few other contenders for the top of Page A1.

A subway in Paris had been bombed. Pictures and stories were coming over the wires. That would be a stretch for the front page in Phoenix, though.

Reporter Abe Kwok had uncovered a pattern of racial intimidation against a family in central Phoenix. Three times, Phoenix police were called to the home. Three times, officers

responded. But in each instance, police failed to file a report.

"Do we have art with this?" News Editor Vinton Supplee asked.

No. The family, fearing additional harassment, refused to be photographed. That's a downer for editors. Ours is a graphic world, and front-page color art is both visually appealing and draws reader attention to the story.

No one, however, criticized the family.

“They’re probably right,” another staffer allowed.

“Well, what’s our lead?” Nicolson wondered.

What would you say? If you were at the meeting, what would you have suggested? Even if you weren't asked, would you like to be sitting in the room when those decisions are being made?

We'd like to invite some of you to observe different meetings that the newsroom and editorial departments conduct throughout the day. We want to open up the process of how we gather the news and comment about it.

We're planning occasional invitations to small groups of readers, no more than five or six people at a time, including average citizens, community leaders and newsmakers interested in how we make our decisions. It ought to be an educational process for our readers and us.

The visits would take a couple of hours. We'll give you a little background about the meetings and the staff members attending. You might have a chance to chat with a few editors and share with me your impressions.

If you are interested, send me a note telling a little about yourself and why you would like to attend. Don't forget to include your name, address, daytime phone number and your occupation. Mail them to me at *The Arizona Republic, P.O.* Box 2245, Phoenix, AZ 85002. Or send e-mail to: rdeuriarte@aol.com or pnireader@aol.com via the Internet.

“Ours is a graphic world, and front-page color art is both visually appealing and draws reader attention to the story.”

You have plenty of meetings to choose from in this building.

On the 10th floor, for example, Gazette Editorial Page Deputy Editor Mark Genrich was fuming. He had his hands on a memo from the state Supreme Court, a post-election analysis of Proposition 102. Does Prop. 102 eliminate jurisdiction of the juvenile court over juveniles? No, the memo says.

"That's what we said before the election;" Genrich told the editorial-page staff. "It's not that they didn't know it. They just lied in the campaign. It makes me so mad."

You just knew a cut-'em-off-at-the-knees column would soon follow.

In The Gazette's editorial-board meetings, my former colleagues debate the daily issues, trying to win Editor James Hill's nod. Columnist John Kolbe noted President Clinton proposing softer cuts in welfare.

"His sop to the left;" Kolbe intoned.

"This is a sop to starving children;" Bill Hart countered.

"He signed the bill, didn't he?" Kolbe rejoined.

Things haven't changed much up there.

Across the way, The Arizona Republic editorial board has invited board members and top staff of Good Samaritan Medical Center and St. Joseph's Hospital to discuss their merger. At these meetings, top policymakers across the Valley, state and nation, argue their positions in hopes of editorial support.

Oh, and about Page One? Taking editor James' advice, reporter Pat Kossan changed her lead paragraph on the Squaw Peak story, taking out the reference to the 500 signs. The story, and the picture, appeared on the front page Wednesday, above the fold.

You should have been there.

Newsroom Independence Without Fear or Favor

In 1896, The New *York* Times was bankrupt. Circulation had dropped to a paltry 9,000. It was losing $2,500 a day. Adolph S. Ochs published a successful newspaper in Chattanooga, Tenn., but he was virtually bankrupt himself. Ochs, however, convinced the day's leading financiers to back his effort to buy and build The New *York* Times. His mission: to establish a "decent, dignified and independent" newspaper that would stand in contrast to the sensational scandal sheets of William Randolph Hearst, James Gordon Bennett and Joseph Pulitzer that ruled the day. His guiding philosophy: "To Give the News Impartially without Fear or Favor Regardless Of Any Party, Sect or Interest Involved:"

This piece of history is recounted in Harrison **Salisbury's 1980** book, "Without Fear or Favor:" The book's central thesis is that, with the publishing of the confidential Pentagon Papers in 1971 that revealed the government's secret history of the Vietnam War (which later led, in part, to the Watergate scandal famously uncovered by The *Washington Post),* the Times finally fulfilled the promise of the press' responsibility as the Fourth Estate—a power center on footing with the society's greatest institutions. That responsibility is rooted in the notion that the press is both surrogate and intermediary for the citizenry, charged with the critical examination of the day's issues. This ascendancy was only possible because of the credibility won through Ochs' insistence on independence. A newspaper inextricably linked with a political party or commercial interest, or a newspaper that could be intimidated or bought off, could never have built a brand name as powerful as *The New York Times.*

Independence in the newsroom is indispensable to reporting truth—or at least as close a view of reality as is humanly possible. Reporting the news without fear or favor means reporting the news without bowing to the interests of those who would see truth bent to their advantage. Only by reporting the news without fear of government reprisal or advertiser anger, without favor to those same interests for future reciprocal gain, can the reader be assured that what they read is the most honest attempt at deciphering reality as independent journalists

can make. Only by producing journalism in such a way can newspapers market its chief virtues—integrity, dependability, accuracy. Only by producing journalism in such a way can newspapers unhypocritically cast its spotlight on the on the charlatans and deceivers it so loves to expose. And only by producing journalism in such a way can journalists live up to the inherent responsibilities attached to the freedom ascribed to them in the U.S. constitution.

"Reporting the news without fear or favor means reporting the news without bowing to the interests of those who would seem truth bent to their advantage."

The independent newsroom is an idealized state. Our world does not exist in such a state, however, and newsrooms are not perfect. Unfortunately, personal biases, advertiser pressure, marketing principles, the public's taste and back-scratching with sources all take their toll on the integrity of the public prints.

But the basic operating model, the standard assumption from which journalists start, is that only a disinterested, thorough examination produces a quality news report. Without fear or favor is the basis by which we try to operate.

Fairness/Credibility

An independent newsroom is not necessarily a fair or credible newsroom. Independent thought can still lack fairness or integrity. Yet, only an independent newsroom can be fair and credible. These qualities are inextricably linked. What do we mean by fair and credible?

Ask a reader what being fair means, and they'll often say, "Showing both sides of an issue:" But being fair is both more and less than that. It is more than that because sometimes there are more than two sides to an issue.

Being fair means thoroughly examining an issue and providing every reasonable opportunity for affected or involved parties to respond to a reporter's inquiries. It means presenting an issue in context. And it means accuracy. Fairness is a behavior that informs reporting strategies. An independent newsroom allows for unfair behavior, but only fairness ensures credibility.

And what is credibility? Credibility is the reputation you have for believability. Does your newspaper that gets it paper publish the truth? And at what rate? How often do they make mistakes? Do they admit those mistakes and correct them?

Credibility is a quality issue. When newspapers are judged on how "good" they are, it is credibility that is judged. Is this a newspaper that gets it right?

"An independent newsroom allows for unfair behavior, but only fairness ensures credibility."

Respecting/Reflecting Community Values

The "left ear" on the front page of The New York Times still carries in it the slogan Adolph S. Ochs first published in 1886: "All The News That's Fit To Print." Editors who worked at a time when the word "budget" wasn't to be uttered in a newsroom, who knew nothing of the paper's financial operations (and, in fact, went out of their way not to know in order to ensure the integrity of the newsroom), may have believed that was what they were delivering to their readers.

In today's world, editors are all too aware that instead of printing all the news that's fit to print (an impossible task to define in any case), they often print, as the joke goes, all the news that fits. There are limits, although the Internet is breaking down boundaries of time and space, imposed by advertising revenue and editorial department constraints, which in part dictate the amount of news published each day.

But just what is "fit" to print? In Ochs' case, it was news deemed significant, important and dignified—the news of government and commerce that shaped public life. It was news, and language, that didn't violate Ochs' standards of taste. The criteria and standards carried out in the paper each day, right or wrong, helped form the newspaper's personality

Today editors make the same decisions, assessing what is "fit" for the day's paper according to a subjective sense of what readers and advertisers want and need.

On some of the universal conundrums editors face, broad industry standards have been instituted. More particular situations require situational ethics and decision-making.

"…instead of printing all the news that's fit to print…they often print, as the joke goes, all the news that fits."

Photojournalism Ethics

It's a gory photo, an upsetting photo, a photo sure to spark outrage. Are you willing to stand up to the criticism you're certain to face if you run the photo? Are you sensationalizing? Is it necessary to run the photo, particularly when many people read their newspaper over breakfast? Does it serve a public good? Does it invade the family's privacy?

The photo department faces an array of ethical conundrums. Debates on today's digital technology often underscore the extent to which photographers used darkroom techniques to alter photographs before digital technology existed. Is there such a thing as non-manipulative photography? Other ethical questions involve photographing minors, or taking photos from public space (the sidewalk) of people in private space (their bedroom), or of the paparazzi. But the most recurring ethical question for photo departments is the use of photos many readers find offensive—photos of dead people or grieving relatives. These are often photos that win Pulitzer Prizes.

Consider the case of Baylee Almon, the baby girl pictured being carried away in a fireman's arms from the Oklahoma City federal building after it was destroyed by a bomb. This photo -like that of the Challenger explosion—became the signature photo of the event. What most readers probably don't know is that Baylee Almon died. Readers probably assumed this girl was being carried to safety. What if they knew from the caption that the girl was already dead? Would that have sparked outrage over the photo?

Readers don't always like bad news. But as Geneva Overholser, former ombudsman for *The Washington Post* and former editor of the Des *Moines Register,* once said, the job of the editor isn't to provide good news but to provide a good newspaper. In fact, it's a higher calling to do so. The press has a duty to report bad news, and if that comes in the form of a photograph rather than a written description, so be it.

The photograph tells a story that should provoke outrage. That is often the first step toward problem-solving. Confronting readers with reality is the job of a newspaper. News values tell us this photograph is the most powerful way to tell the story.

Sensationalizing is a phenomenon that occurs when a photo or story is presented for its own sake with the intent to provoke emotion but without any other basis or value. The provocation is an end in itself.

"The press has a duty to report bad news, and if that comes in the form of a photograph rather than a written description, so be it."

Journalists always ask: Is the photo necessary to accomplish this? Does the story do the job? A photograph is just another element of storytelling. Withholding it is like withholding a fact. Readers are adults who know of death and tragedy in life. They should be considered mature enough to cope with a disturbing image.

As for the family, some newspapers make courtesy calls to warn families, test their feelings and offer condolences. It should never be up to a family, of course, to make an editorial decision. But making such a call, or going through a family friend or religious representative, can be a classy way of handling the issue. The vast majority of the time, journalists find family members supportive—they are outraged and want something done. They want the public to know what has happened to them. And they want a story done right. It will remain in their scrapbooks forever.

Why We Do The Things We Do

The following article is reprinted with permission from the Macon Telegraph.

By Deborah Evans
August 14, 1997

Mornin' Readers! This won't be news to you, but what life offers us is often pretty horrible. I'm talking about such events as the Vietnam War, the space shuttle explosion, the Oklahoma City bombing ... It also isn't news to you that it often falls to newspapers, through words and photos, to chronicle the horrible. Just as we chronicle other “good” news events.

In recent weeks the *Telegraph* has given Page One coverage in words and photos to a program that pairs disabled children with at-risk teens, public schools preparing for the new school year, and the rescue of a child from a burning building by Warner Robins police.

On July 23, we chronicled a Page One story headlined: "Fatal crash snarls traffic:" According to authorities, a Florida couple wasn't wearing seat belts when their car hydroplaned and flipped over. The husband died in the wreck. The wife was treated for her injuries at the scene. A *Telegraph* photographer caught the whole thing on film. We ran a Page One photo. Her bra showed in the photo.

Here's what some of you had to say about our decision to use the photo:

"I would really hate to be her family;" said one member of the *Telegraph's* advisory board.

"The photo brought home to me the violence and seriousness of the wreck;" another member responded.

From a letter that landed on my desk this week: "Your newspaper has reached an all time low. To print a picture of a wreck victim, partially clothed and injured, is about as callous as it gets . ... I expect a little human decency from my community newspaper.”

"How would you like a picture of yourself, half naked, spread over the front page of a daily paper? How would you like a picture like that of

your mother? ... This photo was embarrassing to me ...;' wrote one reader in a letter to the editor.

"You have dishonored and shamed the person of Janice Johnston. Her dignity demanded more;" wrote another reader. "Resist the urge to sensationalize at such cost to the victim of tragedy. Elevate yourselves!"

I thought it would be a good idea to give our photo chief, Woody Marshall, a chance to talk to you about the whys and wherefores of running such a photo.

"Photos like that are disturbing. They are hard photos to look at;" he said. "But we are a newspaper and sometimes news isn't all good. And a lot of times it's not pretty." Woody told me that the photos from the wreck scene also included some of the husband who was killed.

"We chose not to run those;" Woody said. "We looked at a lot of photos and we tried to choose the photo that best described the scene overall without being too insensitive:"

In case you're wondering, Woody has been a photojournalist for 12 years. In that time he has learned something about the impact a photo can have.

"You tend to remember photographs a lot more than other things in the paper;" Woody said. "Photos are easier to remember than words:"

He explained it this way: "If I say 'Vietnam War' to you, you're probably going to remember the photograph that Eddie Adams did of the military person shooting the guy he thought was a spy in the head ... or you're going to remember the little girl running with the napalm, running naked up the path. If I say 'space shuttle; you're going to remember that photograph of the space shuttle explosion."

Sometimes, when the horrible becomes news, something positive can happen.

It had been raining before the Florida couple wrecked. Their Geo Tracker hydroplaned because water had accumulated on I-75, a recurring problem that for some reason state officials have failed to respond to despite local pleas for help.

The coroner asked Woody for a copy of the wreck photo. He feels sure that the photo can be used to make a difference. That maybe this time, with the evidence of the problem in front of their eyes, state officials won't look the other way.

"We all have mamas, sons or daughters who always seem more dear to us after a powerful photo shows the loss messy as it often is of a loved one;" is what one of my bosses had to say about it.

Woody also wants you to know that decisions to run "sensitive" photos aren't made lightly.

Usually, as many people as possible weigh-in on the discussions, including photographers and editors. In fact, you do, too, through your letters and phone calls. Your comments always provide food for thought when the next decision rolls around ...

Scenarios

Local Statesman
Porn at the Paper
Caught in the Crossfire
Skybox View
To March or Not to March
Front Page Politics
Beanie Babies
Suspect
Home Team
Shadowy Candidates
Domestic Violence
State Trooper

Scenarios

The following scenarios are designed not only to provoke discussion but also to help you understand the issues involved in journalism decisions. Consider who the ethical "stakeholders" might be in each scenario. What might be the different ways of handling the situation?

Section three tells how real editors handled a similar situation. We encourage you to think through your own decision before finding out how the "experts" handled it.

Local Statesman

While investigating a story, one of your reporters comes across documents showing that a longtime community leader had been active with the Ku Klux Klan as a teenager. The man, now dead, had a distinguished career both in public service and as a private attorney—a building and a park are named after him. His family still lives in town. This revelation is not relevant to the story your reporter was working on, but it could make an important story in and of itself. Do you print a story?

This scenario is designed not only to provoke a discussion of ethics and decision-making, but also to help you understand the issues involved in journalism decisions. Please discuss this scenario and consider a number of solutions.

Should you print a story about a prominent local figure or save his family embarrassment?

Does the community have a right to know? Does the family have a right to be protected?

Porn at the Paper

Your assistant photo editor has been using company equipment to photograph and print child pornography, including that of his own children. The police have come to your newsroom to make the arrest and the evidence a detective has presented to you is persuasive. Per company policy, the editor is suspended without pay while his case plays out. At the afternoon news meeting, the city editor asks if a reporter should be assigned to write about the arrest, which would surely have been covered. The paper is in an awkward position not only because it might have to embarrass itself in its own pages, but because several staffers know the arrested editor very well—including intimate details of his private life, although none knew about the pornography. What would you do?

This scenario is designed not only to provoke a discussion of ethics and decision-making, but also to help you understand the issues involved in journalism decisions. Please discuss this scenario and consider a number of solutions.

Do you publish the story?

Do you give free reign to the assigned reporter to interview the staffers?

Can the staffers choose to respond with a "no comment," or is that hypocritical?

THE PRESS

Caught in the Crossfire

Gang wars have raged at a public housing complex for months, and now a 15-year-old boy has been shot and killed in the crossfire. One of your photographers was at a nearby school for a feature story when the gunshots rang out, and he was at the scene before the police arrived. He snapped several shots of the slain boy, blood running from his head, before authorities shooed him away. The photo editor brings the picture to you for a final decision: Do you print the photograph?

This scenario is designed not only to provoke a discussion of ethics and decision-making, but also to help you understand the issues involved in journalism decisions. Please discuss this scenario and consider a number of solutions.

Who are the "stakeholders" in this decision?

What harm could be done by running this photograph? By not running it?

What difference does the subject's age make?

THE DAILY TIMES

Skybox View

The local sports team has made it to the world championships, which are being held in your hometown. The game sold out immediately and scalpers are selling the only available tickets for $2,000 a seat. The team owner has invited select editors and reporters to watch the game from his personal skybox at no charge. As he has every year, the owner is also offering a limited number of bleacher seats at $40 to the staff of the newspaper. What should the editors and reporters do?

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If reporters are covering the event, should the paper still have to pay?

Does paying, or not paying, influence the paper's credibility?

To March or Not to March

Your education reporter wants to march in a pro-choice rally. Because abortion is not a part of her beat, she argues, it is not a conflict of interest. Further, she states, she has no intention of ever working on the social issues beat that encompasses the abortion debate at your paper. Your reporter states that she never gave up her rights as a citizen in a democracy when she became a journalist. But the paper has always had a policy against political participation that represented a conflict of interest. Is this a conflict of interest?

This scenario is designed not only to provoke a discussion of ethics and decision-making, but also to help you understand the issues involved in journalism decisions. Please discuss this scenario and consider a number of solutions.

How might a conflict of interest matter to readers?

Is it unfair to prohibit a reporter's participation to keep up appearances before a public who will probably never know?

Front Page Politics

The longtime mayor is retiring after her term and the race to succeed her is wide open. A well-known Republican businessman finally announces his candidacy, resulting in a front-page story. A week later, a Democratic councilwoman announces her candidacy. You put that story on the front page as well. A couple of days later, you receive a phone call from a man who says he will announce his intention the next day to run for mayor as a third-party candidate. Although this third party has never won an election, they've got a small and vocal following. You have a day to decide: Do you put the announcement on front page as well?

This scenario is designed not only to provoke a discussion of ethics and decision-making, but also to help you understand the issues involved in journalism decisions. Please discuss this scenario and consider a number of solutions.

Is it necessary to put the candidate on the front page to be fair?

How are the political candidates different from business or other community groups?

Mercury News

Beanie Babies

A story about the Beanie Baby craze states that only one store in your market carries the toy: Fun Mart. The manager of Toy Palace calls first thing in the morning and is furious. His store carries Beanies as well. The manager wants a similar article written about his store. You tell him you'll call him back. But he calls you two hours later screaming. Fun Mart is a madhouse with shoppers buying Beanies—and because of the lost sales, Toy Palace is now demanding a free ad and public apology. In fact, the scene is so chaotic that extra police officers are called in to handle the crowd and traffic. You know that your reporter blew it and that by writing a second story about the mob scene at Fun Mart, the effect will be compounded. What do you do?

This scenario is designed not only to provoke a discussion of ethics and decision-making, but also to help you understand the issues involved in journalism decisions. Please discuss this scenario and consider a number of solutions.

Does the newspaper have a responsibility to Toy Palace if it was an honest mistake?

Does it make the situation worse to keep writing about it?

THE ENTERPRISE PRESS

Suspect

After a lengthy investigation, the local police department has finally arrested someone for a particularly gruesome double murder in this sleepy suburb. The story has been front-page news both locally and nationally. The suspect is a 25-year-old local man whose family still lives in the area. On a dull Friday afternoon, your police reporter tells you that he's had a major break in the story. Through one of his sources down in the juvenile courts, the reporter learned that while the suspect was still in high school he was repeatedly arrested for violent episodes. At one point he was sent to a mental institution for treatment and put on medication. Your newspaper's policy is not to publish the names and details of juvenile offenders and the suspect has no adult criminal record. The suspect's minister begs you not to publish the story, saying he fears that it will push the already-suicidal man over the edge. Your reporter's worked very hard to put you in front on the story and he tells you that the USA Today isn't far behind on their investigation. How much of this new information should you print?

This scenario is designed not only to provoke a discussion of ethics and decision-making, but also to help you understand the issues involved in journalism decisions. Please discuss this scenario and consider a number of solutions.

The suspect is an adult now. Does that mean we still can't talk about his juvenile record?

Which is the greater responsibility: the man's privacy or the public's right to know?

THE PRESS

Home Team

The use of Native American nicknames—Washington Redskins, Atlanta Braves, Florida State Seminoles—is considered by some to be offensive, even racist. A debate starts within the community about changing your high school's mascot, which uses a Native American nickname. Native American organizations are on one side, and many hard-core fans are on the other. The sports section has tried to remain neutral on this debate so far but it is becoming impossible to ignore the issue any longer. Your town's leading Native American organization comes to you and asks that you no longer use such nicknames in your sports coverage, as you are perpetuating damaging myths about a culture and a people. They threaten to stage a protest in front of your building if you continue. What do you do?

This scenario is designed not only to provoke a discussion of ethics and decision-making, but also to help you understand the issues involved in journalism decisions. Please discuss this scenario and consider a number of solutions.

Should the newspaper take sides in this public debate?

If the local Native American Group does stage a protest, how should you respond? How should you cover it?

The State Chronicle

Shadowy Candidate

Twenty-four hours before a tight election, the mud flies. An insider from the George Jones camp hands a confidential package to one of your reporters. It contains the findings of a state child welfare department investigation into allegations that the incumbent Thomas Smith abused his daughter six years ago. The allegations did not result in charges, but the information in the package seems to indicate there may be more to that story. It also says that Smith's wife filed for bankruptcy 10 years ago when her pet rock company was in trouble. Although the company is doing very well now, it looks like she may have received a particularly generous deal during the reorganization from a prominent and politically-active local bank. Do you print a story and, if so, what kind? What would you consider when making the decision?

This scenario is designed not only to provoke a discussion of ethics and decision-making, but also to help you understand the issues involved in journalism decisions. Please discuss this scenario and consider a number of solutions.

Is the possibility of impropriety more or less relevant than accusations of child abuse?

The candidates may not have a chance to respond to your accusations before the election. Does that affect your coverage?

THE DAILY TIMES

Basketball Coach

A high school science teacher is suspended pending results of an investigation into charges he repeatedly made sexual advances toward a student. The students and staff at the school already know of the allegations and the suspension. Should your readers also know? Now consider this. The teacher is also the basketball coach and his case may not be resolved before next week's game against the cross-town rival. The sports reporters feel that it would be newsworthy to pursue a `coach-less' team angle on this key game. Now what do you do? Do you publish news about the suspensions? Do you name him?

This scenario is designed not only to provoke a discussion of ethics and decision-making, but also to help you understand the issues involved in journalism decisions. Please discuss this scenario and consider a number of solutions.

Does the public have a right to know?

Is a schoolteacher a public figure or should he be treated differently than, say, a politician?

Can you cover the story of the suspension without naming names? Can you cover the basketball game without mentioning the coach's absence?

Domestic Violence

Your police reporter compiles a daily log of crimes and police calls. When charges are made, a suspect's name is published—except in domestic violence cases. It's always been that way at the paper. One explanation is that you can never tell who the real aggressor is, a veteran editor explains. Another, someone else ventures, is that domestic violence is a private crime, not the public's business. On occasion, log entries that are particularly interesting are used as the basis for larger stories. Some domestic violence cases—those involving public figures, serious injury, an unusual number of police responding, potential hostage situations, etc. -also seem worthy of coverage. If you go down that road, do you name names? Does the public have a right to know? What's your policy?

This scenario is designed not only to provoke a discussion of ethics and decision-making, but also to help you understand the issues involved in journalism decisions. Please discuss this scenario and consider a number of solutions.

Is protecting the identity of those involved in domestic violence a public service or does it somehow condone the practice?

Does the severity of the crime matter or should no cases be covered as a matter of policy? How would you decide?

State Trooper

Another law enforcement officer is killed on a Sunday afternoon while responding to a domestic violence call in an area plagued by illegal drug activity. A news photographer arrives on the scene and takes a photograph of the slain officer's body lying on the ground. Your reporters investigate the story and find that the suspect allegedly had an M-1 rifle and had repeatedly abused his wife. The trooper's family lives in the area and will most likely see the photograph. Do you run the photograph? Why or why not?

This scenario is designed not only to provoke a discussion of ethics and decision-making, but also to help you understand the issues involved in journalism decisions. Please discuss this scenario and consider a number of solutions.

What does the photograph add, or not add, to telling this story?

Does the fact that this happened in a high-crime area affect the treatment it should receive?

If the victim wasn't a police officer, would that change things?

How Editors Really Handle It

Local Statesman
Porn at the Paper
Caught in the Crossfire
Skybox View
To March or Not to March
Front Page Politics
Beanie Babies
Suspect
Home Team
Shadowy Candidates
Basketball Coach
Domestic Violence
State Trooper

How Editors Really Handle It

Editors are forced to make dozens of ethical choices every day—some easy, some gut-wrenching. On the following pages, editors reveal how they handled situations similar to the ones we already discussed.

Local Statesman

While investigating a story, one *of* your reporters comes across documents showing that a longtime community leader had been active with the Ku Klux Klan as a teenager. The man, now dead, had a distinguished career both in public service and as a private attorney—a building and a park are named after him. His family still lives in town. This revelation is not relevant to the story your reporter was working on, but it could make an important story in and *of* itself. Do you print a story?

The fact that the subject was a visible public figure gives public interest to any revelations about his life. Its importance is for readers to judge. But his actions in life would surely be re-evaluated. If he was a spirited fighter for civil rights, he may become even more championed for overcoming hatred in his youth. If his actions ever appeared to be racially motivated, there is now ammunition for his critics. For a community influenced enough by this man to have named a park and building after him, it is worth a public debate.

There may be attempts to take his name off the park and building. Again, this is a decision the public will have to make. But it is a debate worth having. For the newspaper to withhold this information is not allowing the public the choice to determine its significance. Keeping a family from embarrassment is not the newspaper's duty. Keeping a truthful historic record is. That said, there are always approaches to covering a story that can bypass pure revelation and instead aim for thoughtfulness. The newspaper may want to seek the family's cooperation in building a fuller profile of the man. It may want to explore possible Klan connections of other leaders of the same era. It may want to investigate the Klan's activities as a whole in the community.

The State Chronicle

Local Statesman

Stories like this can be tricky. But doing more and better journalism can erase some of the difficult questions such stories pose.

Porn at the Paper

Your assistant photo editor has been using company equipment to photograph and print child pornography, including that of his own children. The police have come to your newsroom to make the arrest and the evidence a detective has presented to you is persuasive. Per company policy, the editor is suspended without pay while his case plays out. At the afternoon news meeting, the city editor asks if a reporter should be assigned to write about the arrest, which would surely have been covered. The paper is in an awkward position not only because it might have to embarrass itself in its own pages, but because several staffers know the arrested editor very well –including intimate details of his private life, although none knew about the pornography. What would you do?

Newspapers have been faced with this exact scenario*.* While we can't know the internal machinations of each newsroom, we do know that the decision to publish a story *is* an easy one. The newspaper must publish a *story* if it meets the criteria of newsworthiness, just like any other story. The real conundrum here would be the internal behavior of the newsroom. Again the only reasonable rule of thumb is to behave as if it was any other story. *That means* interviewing people who know the *editor.* As private citizens, they retain the right not to speak, just as acquaintances of any other suspect do when approached by a reporter.

The Coraltown Herald FINAL

Porn at the Paper

What seems like a crisis, or at least a very sticky situation, can be used as an example. Perhaps the paper can piece together a sensitive yet tough story examining how someone comes to be a child pornographer -provided he is guilty that takes advantage of the newspaper's intimate knowledge.

The Newspaper must also address how it came to be that its equipment and premises were being used in such a way without anyone’s knowledge. This is a question a reporter would naturally ask of any other institution.

The newspaper must *behave in* an honest and forthright manner. Any other response calls the

newspaper's credibility, fairness and integrity into question. This tragedy is an opportunity for the newspaper to serve as a role model for others who will no doubt find themselves in a similar situation.

Caught in the Crossfire

Gang wars have raged at a public housing complex for months, and now a 15-year-old boy has been shot and killed in the crossfire. One of your photographers was at a nearby school for a feature story when the gunshots rang out, and he was at the scene before the police arrived. He snapped several shots of the slain boy, blood running from his head, before authorities shooed him away. The photo editor brings the picture to you for a final decision: Do you print the photograph?

The most recurring ethical question for photo departments is the use of photos many readers find offensive—photos of dead people or grieving relatives..

Sometimes editors find compelling reasons to break their own policies, as was the case with the photograph you considered. This photograph ran in the Daily Press of Newport News, Va. Here's how Managing Editor Will Corbin explained his decision to readers. Note the unusual step the paper took by consulting with the victim's family.

Reprinted with permission from the Daily Press, Newport News, Va.
Date: Sunday, August 8, 1993

DEAD TEEN'S PHOTO HAD VALUE BEYOND SHOCK
By Will Corbin
Daily Press Managing Editor
When Mike Asher, the Daily Press' assistant managing editor for graphics, showed me the picture early on that Friday afternoon, my reaction was swift and final: No way.

He held a photograph of the body of a teen-age boy lying on the pavement of a parking lot. Even in its postcard-sized form, it was obvious that the picture was dramatic—and that it held the potential to upset readers on many levels: insensitivity to a family's grief, sensationalism, graphic violence in a family newspaper.

Mike didn't expect the picture to be printed in the paper. Nor did Ken Lyons, the photographer who took it. We have a pretty steadfast policy against printing pictures of bodies, particularly local pictures and even more particularly pictures of children.

The more we looked at that picture, the more disturbing it became -and the more disturbing the prospect that it might never see print. Here was one of the most powerful local photographs we've seen in recent years. Its dramatic mood and lighting told the story of a tragedy. And it spoke volumes about the problems of growing up where kids are too easily lost and guns are too easily found.

The teenager, 15-year-old Jeff Davis, was by all accounts a terrific kid, a young man who had resisted the pressure of peers and circumstances, who had held to the straight and narrow. Now he was dead, the victim of a bullet police say was fired by a 16-year-old. "My kid lost his life for nothing;" his father told our reporter.

We talked about that picture of "Little Jeff" lying dead in the street, debated for more than an hour whether we should use it. Passions ran high on both sides. Just about every editor at the paper had an opinion.

But we finally agreed: This photograph would make our readers angry in a way that was worth upsetting them. It would leave a lasting and indelible impression as a troubling icon of our times. It would frighten them and sicken them and make them think and talk and maybe even act.

And that would be a good thing because too many kids are dying and not enough people are asking why. This wasn't somewhere else, wasn't the make-believe violence of television. The picture would do what words could not: make the tragedy of Little Jeff Davis inescapable for our readers. Then, maybe, he wouldn't have lost his life for nothing.

That's how the argument worked on the public level, on the level of journalism and our obligation to deliver readers information they need to know, even if it causes them pain. As journalists and citizens, we wanted to see that picture in the paper.

On a private level was the grief of the family of Jeff Davis Jr. As parents and neighbors, we knew we couldn't publish it if it would add to the family's hardship.

Before the final decision was made, we talked with the Davis family. Editor Jack Davis—no relation—went to Jeff's father's house and told him and other relatives of our plans. His father didn't want to see the photograph—he wanted only to

know that it didn't show his son's face—but other family members checked it out. Later Friday, we showed the picture to Jeff's mother.

Had they objected strongly to the picture, we wouldn't have run it. But Jeff's family agreed with our reasoning: If using the picture offered any hope of provoking thought or action, then we should run it.

We ran the photograph on Page One on July 31, next to a family portrait of young Davis. It appeared in black and white. A small amount of blood was visible in the photograph, and we felt printing it in color would make it objectionable for the wrong reasons.

After the picture appeared, a number of readers called us, as we expected. Most were concerned primarily for the plight of the family and objected to our use of the picture. When we explained that we had made the family part of the decision, most of the objections dissolved.

From what readers told us, the picture had a positive effect. One mother said it prompted a family gathering for a discussion of the issues the picture represented. A Hampton teacher used it to generate some soul-searching by her summer-school class.

The picture still disturbed them, a number of readers told me. But that's good. That's what it was supposed to do.

Skybox View

The local sports team has made it to the world championships, which are being held in your hometown. The game sold out immediately and scalpers are selling the only available tickets for$2,000 a seat. The team owner has invited select editors and reporters to watch the game from his personal skybox at no charge. As he has every year, the owner is also offering a limited number of bleacher seats at $40 to the staff of the newspaper. What should the editors and reporters do?

During the 1996 World Series, New York Yankees owner George Steinbrenner invited select editors and reporters to watch the games from his luxury box at Yankee Stadium. Most of the invited journalists rejected Steinbrenner's offer. But many of those who did reject his offer were not above buying tickets for $40 that were getting $2,000 for scalpers on the street—tickets not available to the general public. Why was the ethical line drawn where it was? It's a question still hotly debated, particularly in sports and entertainment departments were tickets and memorabilia have long been one of the perks publicists loved to hand out to journalists

In the last 20 years, however, most newsrooms have implemented strict policies governing freebies as journalists have asserted their independence.

In Steinbrenner's case, for example, the box seat invitations came at a time when the Yankees sought public approval for a billion-dollar plan for a new stadium. "The clubs like to take care of people who you think might be helpful to you;" Rich Levin, public relations director for Major League Baseball, told Editor & Publisher magazine. The criteria may be easy for making the decision but the real-life situations are rarely as clear-cut.

THE DAILY TIMES

Basketball Coach

To March or Not to March

Your education reporter wants to march in a pro-choice rally. Because abortion is not a part *of* her beat, she argues, it is not a conflict *of* interest. Further, she states, she has no intention *of* ever working on the social issues beat that encompasses the abortion debate at your paper. Your reporter states that she never gave up her rights as a citizen in a democracy when she became a journalist. But the paper has always had a policy against political participation that represented a conflict *of* interest. Is this a conflict *of* interest?

The question of political participation has long been a sticky one. Washington Post editor Len Downie famously declined to vote to preserve his independence. Of course, that act is only meaningful if Downie empties his mind of all political thought—otherwise it's a meaningless symbolic act that can't be construed to make him a fairer decision maker.

In this case, the reporter's argument is attractively simple. There is no conflict of interest. What's the problem? Well, there are many problems. First, issues in real life do not conform to beats. They cut across them. For example, issues like sex education, school-based clinics, and condom giveaways all relate to issues involved in abortion. There is also no way to foresee how beats may be reconfigured in the future—perhaps she'll be on a reporting team that includes abortion issues, whether she directly reports on them or not. Her stance also leaves her open to a general political characterization—as a liberal, for example—that could in readers' minds, or those of the people she covers, call her work on other issues into question. On Oct. 6, 1997, the Supreme Court rejected without comment an appeal from Sandra Nelson, who lost her reporting job (she was made an editor) with The News Tribune in Tacoma, Washington, after she refused to stop her off-the-job political activities, including work on behalf of gay rights. The rejection left intact a ruling giving all newspapers in that state the same authority to act as The News Tribune did. Editors watched the case closely as a test of a newspaper's right to protect its credibility by exercising control over the off-duty activities of its editorial employees.

Many journalists like to say they are still citizens and therefore demand to act on that citizenry. But many professions demand sacrifices in return for privileges.

An elected officeholder, for example, gives up many financial opportunities. A city worker may be forced to comply with residency requirements—they aren't allowed to live in the suburbs. A newspaper reporter gives up the right to political involvement—it puts too many questions into a reader's mind about bias.

Critics of this stance raise two points: What if readers never know—after all, would you recognize a reporter leading a march? And isn't it more honest to come clean about political positions so we can better evaluate a reporter's work?

But these objections miss the largest point. In the first case, the overwhelming possibility of getting away with something doesn't mean it's acceptable. The newspaper must constantly guard not only things that seem to be biased, but also situations that can create bias.

Although there is a school of thought that believes a newspaper's distance from the community is always detrimental, with such highly charged issue as abortion, a little cool-headed distance may be the safest course of action.

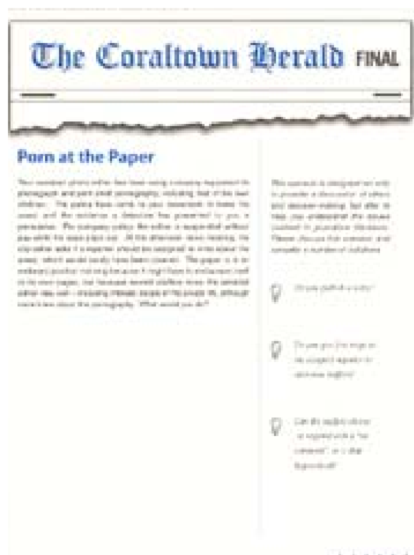
Front Page Politics

The longtime mayor is retiring after her term and the race to succeed her is wide open. A well-known Republican businessman finally announces his candidacy, resulting in a front-page story. A week later, a Democratic councilwoman announces her candidacy. You put that story on the front page as well. A couple of days later, you receive a phone call from a man who says he will announce his intention the next day to run for mayor as a third-party candidate. Although this third party has never won an election, they've got a small and vocal following. You have a day to decide: Do you put the announcement on front page as well?

On the face of it, fairness would seem to dictate a front-page placement. But is every announcement equal? What if the KKK announced it was putting forth a candidate? What about a joke candidate running on a free-beer platform? On the other hand, who is the press to decide who is worthy? Richard Nixon was once thought politically dead. At one time, Ronald Reagan was barely taken seriously. Nobody foresaw Perot's impact in presidential politics.

This is one of the toughest conundrums newspaper editors face. Quality newspapers have a decent solution: don't ever get in the position of the editor in the scenario, who is not operating by a previously established policy. Particularly with a campaign season upon them, good editors will establish a battle plan laying out the parameters and policies of the season's political coverage. Handling announcements would be covered. Here's how one editor handled the issue, as reprinted from his column in the October 30, 1993 edition of Editor & Publisher.

Local Candidates' Announcements: Manipulation Is Avoidable
By Harry Allen
In "Controlling the Media is Shamefully Easy" (E&P, Shop Talk at Thirty, Feb. 20, p. 56), University of Kentucky photojournalism professor Steve Dozier described how his experience as a political candidate led him to conclude that "yet another piece of our industry needs to be overhauled."


The Coraltown Herald FINAL

Porn at the Paper

What generated such an alarming and generalized conclusion about media gullibility?

Dozier ran for a school board seat in Lexington, Ky., last fall. When he announced his intention to run, he held a press conference early on a Saturday afternoon, hoping for TV coverage and good play in the Sunday edition of the Lexington Herald-Leader.

Dozier said he "hit the jackpot" because three television crews "arrived as if on cue;" and the Herald-Leader's story was "long, clear and accurate with a five-column headline, a subhead and a full one-column mug with photo credit."

The Herald-Leader's city editor, John Miller, said his paper's story was unlikely to have had a significant impact on the race.

"What Dozier failed to mention in his article is that his so-called `jackpot' with us was a 10-paragraph story on page six of the local news section;' Miller said. "And it was no different from the play and length given his four opponents. The *Herald-Leader* has a policy of giving similar space and location as much as possible to routine political announcements from candidates in the same race:"

(Note: In a letter responding to this column, Dozier claimed his announcement story was 40 percent longer than an average of the other articles, with a larger headline and larger mug shot.) Nevertheless, Dozier raised an important issue: Newspapers and television and radio stations should be consistent in their coverage of local politics. Candidates who understand newsroom schedules know that Saturday is a slow news day, and know that TV news crews are desperate for visuals, shouldn't have an advantage over candidates who are naive about news.

All editors, and most journalism professors, know that public officials, public relations practitioners and politicians try to use the media to their advantage. That is why so many editors try so hard to ensure even-handed coverage of local politics.

For at least 10 years, the *Ledger, an* 82,000-circulation daily in Lakeland, Fla., has refused to run announcing-for-office stories until the candidate opens a campaign account and registers the account and campaign treasurer's name with the supervisor of elections.

By having a reporter check daily to see whether any candidates have opened accounts, the newspaper eliminates the

Saturday announcement/Sunday story problem. This policy also eliminates the "so-and-so says he might run" kites that some would-be politicians would like us to fly. (Such speculation is ideal for the *Ledger's* Sunday political column.) When the *Ledger publishes* local candidate announcement stories, guidelines ensure that all candidates get equal treatment: Announcement stories go below the fold on page three of the local section, they all have a one-column mug, and they all run eight to 10 inches.

"Before the policy, we had announcements on the front page, inside, with mugs and without, some six-column heads, some one-column," *Ledger* executive editor Skip Perez said. "It was at the whim of the person doing layout:"

Perez noted that the *Ledger's policy* is a guideline rather than an ironclad rule.

"There are times when newsworthiness supersedes the guidelines;" he said, citing an article about a former sheriff who decided to seek re-election five years after resigning in disgrace.

Other newspapers and radio and TV stations have different approaches:

The St. Petersburg Times runs local election announcement stories on inside pages of the appropriate metro or regional sections and publishes a mug and blurb teaser on the section front.

Times Managing Editor Neville Green said the newspaper doesn't have written guidelines on placement and length.

"But we make sure they are dealt with in an equitable manner;" he said.

In Nashville, the *Tennessean requires* candidates to fill out a two-page disclosure form that includes biographical and financial information

"We run the announcements for local races on inside pages in a formatted box;" said Frank Gibson, the *Tennessean's* government/ political editor. "All the boxes have the same type of information. There is no headline, just a logo to identify the story:"

At *WINK-TV* in Fort Myers, Fla., station manager Mel Martin said his news department is "pretty tough" on candidates who try to exploit the media.

"We can usually sense that kind of manipulation;" he said.

WINK won't cover a news conference unless the candidate tells the station in advance what it's about, and it doesn't cover political news conferences the day before an election, when candidates are prone to make last-minute allegations.

At the Detroit Free Press, where Dozier worked until 1995, Executive Editor Heath Menwether said stories about races for offices below the mayoral level aren't given much prominence.

"But on all the announcement stories, we try to give each of the candidates equal space," he said. "That is a standing rule ... It's part of the common-law knowledge of our editors:"

Charles Burke, an associate professor of telecommunication at the University of Florida, is not optimistic about the media's ability to avoid being manipulated.

"It's the era of PR, and I'm afraid they're in the ascendancy because of our passivity," he said.

Martin expressed a similar view but noted that not all journalists are passive.

"I do think the media are being manipulated because we're chumps;" he said. "But a lot of us aren't, and there are ways to prevent it."

Politicians and readers—especially those on the losing side—will never be happy with our campaign coverage, but common-sense policies and procedures will improve our journalism and give them less to criticize. (Allen, an associate professor of journalism at Western Kentucky University, is a former city editor of the *Ledger, Lakeland,* Fla.)

Beanie Babies

A story about the Beanie Baby craze states that only one store in your market carries the toy: Fun Mart. The manager of Toy Palace calls first thing in the morning and is furious. His store carries Beanies as well. The manager wants a similar article written about his store. You tell him you'll call him back. But he calls you two hours later screaming. Fun Mart is a madhouse with shoppers buying Beanies, and because of the lost sales, Toy Palace is now demanding a free ad and public apology. In fact, the scene is so chaotic that extra police officers are called in to handle the crowd and traffic. You know that your reporter blew it and that by writing a second story about the mob scene at Fun Mart, the effect will be compounded. What do you do?

This is one of those situations that editors lie awake at night worrying about. Despite their best efforts, these kinds of careless mistakes slip in with wrong phone numbers, incorrect times or missing facts. A group of editors gathered for an ASNE conference read this scenario and could remember countless other examples of similar situations at their own papers. They agreed that the best approach would be to try to correct the misinformation proactively.

The editors were as concerned about what damage misinformation might do to their readers as to potential advertisers. The editors decided to do a story on the mob scene, admit the role of the paper in the story and run a correction. It would also run a complete list of stores selling Beanie Babies. They also suggested that if the paper had an ombudsman, it would make for a good column.

Mercury News

Domestic Violence

Suspect

After a lengthy investigation, the local police department has finally arrested someone for a particularly gruesome double-murder in this sleepy suburb. The story has been front-page news both locally and nationally. The suspect is a 25 year-old local man whose family still lives in the area. On a dull Friday afternoon, your police reporter tells you that he's had a major break in the story. Through one of his sources down in the juvenile courts, the reporter learned that while the suspect was still in high school he was repeatedly arrested for violent episodes. At one point he was sent to a mental institution for treatment and put on medication. Your newspaper's policy is not to publish the names and details of juvenile offenders and the suspect has no adult criminal record. The suspect's minister begs you not to publish the story, saying he fears that it will push the already-suicidal man over the edge. Your reporter's worked very hard to put you in front on the story and he tells you that the USA Today isn't far behind on their investigation. How much of this new information should you print?

There are several components to this scenario. First, most newspapers have a policy against publishing the names of suspects unless they are actually charged. This is because anyone could conceivably be a suspect to any crime. Police investigators may, as a technique to flush out the real suspect, question those they believe to have knowledge of a crime but who aren't the primary suspect. Some suspects may be brought in as a result of mistaken identity. A great many African-Americans can attest to the experience of being stopped on the road without cause; Arabic men who "fit the profile" of terrorists are wrongly detained at airports.

THE ENTERPRISE PRESS

Suspect

To smear anyone considered merely a "suspect" whom the police have inadequate evidence to *charge is* unethical. Many police reporters have experienced late-night deadline calls to the station asking *if* a suspect has been charged yet. If so, the reporter can put the name in the story. If not, the story is killed or merely refers to a suspect being held for questioning.

Of course, the poster *story* for *the* debate about naming names is *the case* of Richard Jewell, *once* purported to be the Olympic Park bomber of Atlanta. Now we know Jewell is innocent – and winning handsome settlements from news agencies that besmirched his character. But Jewell was hardly the first. Consider the case of Edward Humphrey, a troubled 18-year-old who was once the sure-fire suspect in the infamous Gainesville slayings of five University of Florida students. After a flurry of convicting articles by major news sources he was cleared of any suspicion by authorities

It's important to remember that one reason to name names once a suspect is charged isn't just because we can, or an official threshold has been passed. It's also to protect a suspect who has entered the criminal justice system. The process in America is meant to be an open one to prevent secret arrests, secret charges and secret trials that have historically been used to punish political foes or otherwise harass people.

Home Team

The use of Native American nicknames -Washington Redskins, Atlanta Braves, Florida State Seminoles—is considered by some to be offensive even racist. A debate starts within the community about changing your high school's mascot, which uses a Native American nickname. Native American organizations are on one side, and many hard-core fans are on the other. The sports section has tried to remain neutral on this debate so far but it is becoming impossible to ignore the issue any longer. Your town's leading Native American organization comes to you and asks that you no longer use such nicknames in your sports coverage, as you are perpetuating damaging myths about a culture and a people. They threaten to stage a protest in front of your building if you continue. What do you do?

This scenario provoked a host of questions with editors we talked with. Should the newspaper take sides in a public debate? Is the newspaper culpable in perpetuating stereotypes? Would the newspaper be inaccurate in not reporting the formal names of sports teams? What about community standards? The group also wrestled with how it would make and explain its decision. Were there precedents to follow? Journalistic principles at stake? A public service issue?

At a recent conference of top newspaper editors, Sherrie Miller of the (Minneapolis) *Star Tribune* detailed a similar process to the one her newspaper used to deal with this exact issue. First, they would hold an editors' meeting and invite Native American groups to attend. Editors would send a memo to the staff and cover, as a story, its decision to drop the use of the nicknames. The paper, after all, Miller says, makes many decisions designed not to offend—holding back grisly photos or prohibiting certain types of language.

Miller summarized by saying that the key issue is whether the nicknames were considered offensive by community standards. Milton Coleman, deputy managing editor of *The Washington Post* said that the decision could be different at his or other newspapers where

regional sensibilities were not the same as those in Minneapolis. Thus, the decision wasn't made on the newspaper's own judgment about the nicknames, but on the basis of serving an aggrieved community.

Shadowy Candidate

Twenty-four hours before a tight election, the mud flies. An insider from the George Jones camp hands a confidential package to one of your reporters. It contains the findings of a state child welfare department investigation into allegations that the incumbent Thomas Smith abused his daughter six years ago. The allegations did not result in charges, but the information in the package seems to indicate there may be more to that story. It also says that Smith's wife filed for bankruptcy 10 years ago when her pet rock company was in trouble. Although the company is doing very well now, it looks like she may have received a particularly generous deal during the reorganization from a prominent and politically-active local bank. Do you print a story and, if so, what kind? What would you consider when making the decision?

What parts of this scenario are newsworthy and worth pursuing? What is the purpose of traditional blackout rules regarding publishing controversial information in the day before an election? How does the paper meet its basic obligation to fairness while at the same time serving the public good?

A group of top editors decided to pursue both stories as far as they could and only publish a story if it was nailed down 100 percent. They didn't think they'd get a story in time anyway. They would check out the person who gave the file as well. But meeting an Election Day deadline would not be the primary goal. If they found out incriminating information, the candidate could still lose his office after the election if the allegations proved true.

The ultimate piece of criteria here was to be faithful to the story, regardless of the timing.

The timing was of secondary importance. Competition was a stronger factor. But timing did play a role—despite claiming reporting standards don't differ among stories, it was clear that the editors were demanding this story be nailed down in a way beyond the routine before publishing. The editors would observe a traditional `blackout' or a no-coverage period immediately before an election with this story as with all news about the election.

Some people want to know why the newspaper would run a story on a political candidate's nearly decade-old bankruptcy, and publish accounts of another elected official's financial

problems and failure to report a private personal loan as required by law. Fair question.

The answer is that the public has a right to know about all the people it elects to make the rules, decide the issues and handle the public treasury.

That doesn't presuppose that the public actually wants to know these and other facts about officials. A majority may not give a hoot one way or the other. But they still have right to know, and a newspaper is duty-bound to report the information for whatever readers may think it's worth.

Each reader will apply his or her particular interpretation to the news. Some people will be entirely sympathetic to the candidate whose past bankruptcy is reported while others will analyze the circumstances and reach some conclusion about how the candidate handled it. Still others may entertain doubts about the candidate's financial acumen.

Basketball Coach

A high school science teacher is suspended pending results of an investigation into charges he repeatedly made sexual advances toward a student. The students and staff already know of the allegations and the suspension. Should your readers also know? Now consider this. The teacher is also the basketball coach and his case may not be resolved before next week's game against the cross-town rival. The sports reporters feel that it would be newsworthy to pursue a `coach-less' team angle on this key game. Now what do you do? Do you publish news about the suspensions? Do you name him?

The Oregonian faced a similar scenario. A male elementary school gym teacher was accused of inappropriate touching by several girls. The teacher was put on paid leave while police investigated. Should he be named in the paper? The investigation found that the girls made the whole thing up. A statement clearing the teacher was issued, including his name. Should he then be named? According to an APME News report on the case, the editors decided the name was not necessary to the story. The fact that they could use the name, they thought, didn't override the damage he could face if they did use the name, even though he was cleared of wrongdoing. The editors later realized the paper made the same decision in a similar case three years earlier.

THE DAILY TIMES

Basketball Coach

A high-profile case of false accusation we would do well to remember involved Dallas Cowboys receiver Michael Irvin. Irvin was accused of holding a gun to a woman's head while another player raped her. The allegations were treated as truth by most media outlets. *Newsweek* published a story even after it had found at least one credible witness who gave Irvin an alibi. Like many other stories, the piece was couched in such a way as to suggest that even if the allegations weren't true, the football culture in which it happened made it plausible—the fault of Cowboys players and management. The allegations were later found to be false and the woman was prosecuted.

Domestic Violence

Your police reporter compiles a daily log of crimes and police calls. When charges are made, a suspect's name is published -except in domestic violence cases. It's always been that way at the paper. One explanation is that you can never tell who the real aggressor is, a veteran editor explains. Another, someone else ventures, is that domestic violence is a private crime, not the public's business. On occasion, log entries that are particularly interesting are used as the basis for larger stories. Some domestic violence cases—those involving public figures, serious injury, an unusual number of police responding, potential hostage situations, etc.—also seem worthy of coverage. If you go down that road, do you name names? Does the public have a right to know? What's your policy?

Some editors shy away from domestic violence stories because they are often of the he said/she said variety. Others publish issue stories, but not stories of particular incidents and certainly don't publish real names. Still others say a crime is a crime, and if a suspect is charged, an exception won't be made based on the type of crime.

Beyond those issues is a split over whether publishing news *of* such incidents will inflame abusers or shame them.

Here's what one editor believes.

Presstime *Managing Editor Nancy Davis studied domestic violence coverage in newspapers and recently published this summary in her magazine:*

Mercury News

Domestic Violence

Despite privacy issues and divided opinions concerning the practice, more U.S. newspaper editors should consider publishing regular articles about domestic violence, whether they name those involved or not. To accurately reflect their communities, *every* publisher needs to establish a policy that keeps these crimes in the public eye, just as *The Caledonian-Record* has done in St. Johnsbury, VT.

That sums up my conclusions, based on a three-year study of *The Caledonian-Record's* pioneering policy of *reporting on* most acts of domestic violence

uncovered by police or heard before the courts in its circulation *area (Presstime,* March 1995, p. 44). Nearly every edition of the 11,308-circulation evening daily recounts a tragic incident and includes the names of the adult victims and abusers. William E. Cote, associate professor of journalism at Michigan State University in East Lansing and former coordinator of the school's Victims and the Media Program, knows of no other U.S. paper that follows such a procedure.

This editorial practice made it possible to measure some effects of publishing names by conducting a mail survey and talking to victims, abusers and the professionals who work with them, and comparing the volume of restraining orders issued before and after the newspaper reported these cases.

Understanding the forces at work here could help journalists make responsible news judgments concerning such personal stories and expand resources for covering domestic violence. Here are some of the conclusions:

- Victim advocates identify publicity as just one of several deterrents to victims seeking help. Many victims and abusers avoid getting aid because they don't want anyone to know about the problem; some want to continue abusive relationships.

- To date, no practitioner or victim could point to an incident where publication of victims' or abusers' names directly caused further physical violence, though many insist that the potential for harm exists.

- After four years of publishing names and detailed news accounts, long-term effects remain obscure, especially concerning the question of whether publishing names makes victims hesitate to file charges and pursue prosecution.

Statistician Max Schlueter, director of the Vermont Crime Information Center, wrote that 'data are inconclusive as to demonstrating a causal link between the actions of *The Caledonian-Record and* the relief-from-abuse filings in that county ...If you had survey data from the at-risk population or from service providers that potential plaintiffs did in fact fail to file because they were concerned that their names would appear in the paper, that data would bolster a conclusion of a chilling effect;

he wrote, but available data are 'not sufficiently compelling:

Some other findings from the research:

- The C-R's stories do not appear to be written to merely shock or titillate.
- Though theorists acknowledge the role media play in social control, evidence doesn't support the idea that media reporters could directly alleviate abuse. As a deterrent, the effect of 'shaming' abusers hasn't been studied, but at least one psychologist says that shame would be unlikely to improve behavior.
- The idea that such coverage spurs ‘imitative' behavior has been weighed by criminologists, with inconclusive results.
- Publishing names clearly fosters victims' fear of physical or verbal retaliation by abusers, creates public embarrassment for them and their children, and may affect the way they perform their jobs or conduct business.

For an editor considering publication of victims' names, such suffering must be weighed against the public's right to know, First Amendment freedom and the education that may take place when journalists consistently and repeatedly put such crimes on a par with other crimes of equal violence crimes that typically get far more ink.

State Trooper

Another law enforcement officer is killed on a Sunday afternoon while responding to a domestic violence call in an area plagued by illegal drug activity. A news photographer arrives on the scene and takes a photograph of the slain officer's body lying on the ground. Your reporters investigate the story and find that the suspect allegedly had an M-1 rifle and had repeatedly abused his wife. The trooper's family lives in the area and will most likely see the photograph. Do you run the photograph? Why or why not?

Although this photograph contains no blood, the victim was a sheriff's deputy killed in the line of duty—a difficult situation without an explanation on the part of the media. When the Riverside PressEnterprise of Riverside, Calif. published the photograph, they faced a firestorm of public outrage. Here's how Editor and Publisher Marcia McQuern explained her decision to run the photograph:

Why the picture of the deputy and why the protests?
Marcia McQuern
Jan. 12, 1997

This newspaper upset many of you last Monday by publishing a photograph in which a slain deputy sheriff could be seen lying on the ground, face up, arms outstretched. We knew the decision to show you the tragic result of putting our society's law enforcers in harm's way would be upsetting. It was to us.

We hope the sight of that young man lying there, so lost to his family and friends, would bring home to you in a powerful way the tragedy of the ambush-murder of two deputies answering a scared woman's plea for protection. Our reporter's words told you about it in thorough, sensitively written stories, but we knew words don't have the instant impact of pictures—words are by nature more remote.

So, we hope the picture of the death scene, though bloodless and taken from some distance, would invoke in you, as it did in us, horror in the magnitude of the crime and the loss. We also hoped it would move you, as it did us, to more sympathy for the slain men's families, more appreciation of their sacrifice, and more respect for their colleagues still doing their dangerous jobs.

It even crossed our minds that it would show you that domestic violence is a serious, dangerous problem not just for those abused

and that it might focus attention on the problems of powerful military weapons in the hands of violent, criminally-inclined people. In other words, we knew it was an excellent news picture that told a major story well, and expected it would help our community understand the impact of that story.

Clearly for a great many of you the picture brought home the tragedy all too painfully.

Some, especially in or on the periphery of the law enforcement community, objected to the picture's publication because of their own reaction to it. It hit too close to home. Few if any of us likes being reminded of our own mortality or that of our loved ones or wants to have to justify our professional calling to our concerned families. We also don't want to dwell on the vulnerability of those who protect us from society's predators.

Others objected to what they saw as the picture's invasion of the dead deputy's privacy, and thought we were somehow being disrespectful to them by printing it. Perhaps a violation of some unspoken cultural aversion to showing the image of a person, especially the face of a person, at the point of death.

But most who protested, especially those in law enforcement, did so in the name of the survivors of the dead man in the picture, especially his children. That was a powerful point made by our county sheriff in two telephone calls to my home late Sunday night asking that we not publish the picture. Since I had approved its publication based on an oral description of its content, his request prompted me to go see the picture for myself. I had understood all along that just because we had a dramatic picture of a news event and had the right to print it, that does not mean we should

The Coraltown Herald FINAL

State Trooper

My obligation was not to the sheriff, much as I've admired his performance in office, nor to his deputies, much as I appreciate their difficult jobs, nor even to the families of the dead, as much as I sympathize with them. The obligation of a newspaper is to those who read it and rely on it

for accurate and complete coverage of what is happening in their world. It cannot do its job well while trying to avoid offending the exaggerated sensibilities of some and the desire of others to remain unaware of unpleasantness.

The picture and dispute was the truth of last Sunday morning's events. It was not a pretty picture, but neither was the reality of what happened.

Upon seeing the picture I knew instantly I wouldn't pull it. I also knew, as I had when I first heard of it, that some of our readers would react negatively to the decision. Some always do when we print strong pictures of tragedies. Therefore, I also knew instantaneously that it would be against our financial interests to publish the picture.

The overwhelming majority of our newspapers for last Monday were already sold to subscribers. And most who buy a paper from a news rack buy the same one every time. So I knew we would not sell more papers because of the picture.

In fact, I knew from experience we would lose some subscribers and advertisers seeking outlet for their distress. And I knew that our news competitors would report, and some even gleefully foment, public outrage at our actions.

But we do not consider our paper's commercial interests in making news judgments. Our readers would not, nor should they, trust us if we did.

After the picture appeared, the managing editor and I, the only people ultimately responsible for its publication, were prepared to explain our decision and accept criticism. But we were, frankly, surprised by both the intensity and volume of the negative reaction.

Some of it was organized by the deputies union and its counterparts, and some came from citizens shocked by the deaths who were angry at us out of solidarity with the deputies. But much of it was independent of these influences.

We understand and respect the motives of those who most disagree with our decision. Some of them work alongside us here at the newspaper. It is impossible, however, to respect the opinions of those who apparently think we will be persuaded to their point of view by directing personal insults, obscenities, threats and harassment at people who clearly

had no role in the decision to publish the picture.

But most who called or wrote us were not obscene or threatening. They were sincere in their belief we had made a bad decision and wanted to register their protest in the best spirit of democratic dialogue, in hopes we would adopt their point of view in future decisions.

We particularly understand and appreciate the desire expressed by many to protect the deputy's survivors. If only not printing a picture would bring back these husbands, fathers and friends. The awful reality is that withholding it wouldn't have. Neither would it have reduced their families' current pain, although some honestly believe so and maybe even the survivors have been persuaded so by now.

We know from experience that it cannot be accurately predicted how a survivor will react to a published picture of the deceased. Different people react differently. While some indeed are angry about a picture, some are immediately grateful that we've memorialized their loved one. Some later say they came to appreciate that a picture was taken so everyone understands what happened to their loved one. And others never tell us what they thought of it.

Our society has a trouble dealing with death. Euphemisms are invented—"departed" and "passed away"—to avoid even the word. And unfortunately, amid the welter of confusing images that bombard us all daily, the line between fictional violence and real death often gets blurred.

We have a hard time understanding how it would be so bad if the image in that picture were burned in the community's memory. It shows a hero who died coming to a citizen's rescue, doing what he loved to do in the service of us all.

So the seemingly universal disapproval of law enforcement is particularly perplexing given our motives in publishing the picture. We also confess to being puzzled about the paucity of expressed anger at the real sources of all our pain. The offense at our community was committed by a sniper, not a photographer or an editor.

Virtually no one expresses outrage to us about the killing itself. No one seems disturbed that an oft-arrested violent man allegedly had an M-1 rifle designed for killing humans. No one seems concerned that

nothing seemed to happen when neighbors suspected illegal drug activity in the area. No one seems concerned about the domestic violence apparently endured by a woman. Was no one else chilled the suspect's wife later told a neighbor that, though fearing for her life, she wished she had not called police for help. And no one seemed to concern that the lack of respect for police—a far different situation than existed 40 years ago—has grown into a commonly demonstrated anti-cop contempt exercised by too large a part of the population. Is it any wonder this sea-change in society's values has led to the level of danger police face everyday on routine duties in the midst of an armed populace? Maybe at least part of the explanation for the massive negative reaction to our picture is that many feel, and to a great extent are, helpless and frustrated in the face of such problems. With the accused murderer locked away and the processes of justice for him grinding slowly on, at least they can tell off the people who made that reality all too vivid. Another part of the explanation may be that ire about the picture triggers memories of other times they didn't like what we did—the story they thought we should've covered but didn't, the editorial they disagreed with, the negative publicity engendered by the chase and deputy beating of illegal immigrants. I know many of you were offended, and for that we are sorry.

Appendix

Codes of Ethics

Appendix

Society of Professional Journalists Code of Ethics

Preamble

Members of the Society of Professional Journalists believe that public enlightenment is the forerunner of justice and the foundation of democracy. The duty of the journalist is to further those ends by seeking truth and providing a fair and comprehensive account of events and issues. Conscientious journalists from all media and specialties strive to serve the public with thoroughness and honesty. Professional integrity is the cornerstone of a journalist's credibility. Members of the Society share a dedication to ethical behavior and adopt this code to declare the Society's principles and standards of practice.

Seek Truth and Report It

Journalists should be honest, fair and courageous in gathering, reporting and interpreting information.

Journalists Should

- Test the accuracy of information from all sources and exercise care to avoid inadvertent error. Deliberate distortion is never permissible.
- Diligently seek out subjects of news stories to give them the opportunity to respond to allegations of wrongdoing.
- Identify sources whenever feasible. The public is entitled to as much information as possible on sources' reliability.
- Always question sources' motives before promising anonymity. Clarify conditions attached to any promise made in exchange for information. Keep promises.
- Make certain that headlines, news teases and promotional material, photos, video, audio, graphics, sound bites and quotations do not

misrepresent. They should not oversimplify or highlight incidents out of context.

- Never distort the content of news photos or video. Image enhancement for technical clarity is always permissible. Label montages and photo illustrations.

- Avoid misleading re-enactments or staged news events. If re-enactment is necessary to tell a story, label it.

- Avoid undercover or other surreptitious methods of gathering information except when traditional open methods will not yield information vital to the public. Use of such methods should be explained as part of the story.

- Never plagiarize.

- Tell the story of the diversity and magnitude of the human experience boldly, even when it is unpopular to do so.

- Examine their own cultural values and avoid imposing those values on others.

- Avoid stereotyping by race, gender, age, religion, ethnicity, geography, sexual orientation, disability, physical appearance or social status.

- Support the open exchange of views, even views they find repugnant.

- Give voice to the voiceless; official and unofficial sources of information can be equally valid.

- Distinguish between advocacy and news reporting. Analysis and commentary should be labeled and not misrepresent fact or context.

- Distinguish news from advertising and shun hybrids that blur the lines between the two.

Minimize Harm

Ethical journalists treat sources, subjects and colleagues as human beings deserving of respect.

Journalists should:

- Show compassion for those who may be affected adversely by news coverage. Use special sensitivity when dealing with children and inexperienced sources or subjects.
- Be sensitive when seeking or using interviews or photographs of those affected by tragedy or grief.
- Recognize that gathering and reporting information may cause harm or discomfort. Pursuit of the news is not a license for arrogance.
- Recognize that private people have a greater right to control information about themselves than do public officials and others who seek power, influence or attention. Only an overriding public need can justify intrusion into anyone's privacy.
- Show good taste. Avoid pandering to lurid curiosity.
- Be cautious about identifying juvenile suspects or victims of sex crimes.
- Be judicious about naming criminal suspects before the formal filing of charges.
- Balance a criminal suspect's fair trial rights with the public's right to be informed.

Act Independently

Journalists should be free of obligation to any interest other than the public's right to know.

Journalists should:

- Avoid conflicts of interest, real or perceived.
- Remain free of associations and activities that may compromise integrity or damage credibility.
- Refuse gifts, favors, fees, free travel and special treatment, and shun secondary employment, political involvement, public office and service in community organizations if they compromise journalistic integrity.
- Disclose unavoidable conflicts.
- Be vigilant and courageous about holding those with power accountable.
- Deny favored treatment to advertisers and special interests and resist their pressure to influence news coverage.
- Be wary of sources offering information for favors or money; avoid bidding for news.

Be Accountable

Journalists are accountable to their readers, listeners, viewers and each other.

Journalists should:

- Clarify and explain news coverage and invite dialogue with the public over journalistic conduct.
- Encourage the public to voice grievances against the news media.
- Admit mistakes and correct them promptly.

- Expose unethical practices of journalists and the news media.
- Abide by the same high standards to which they hold others.

APME Code of Ethics

Revised and Adopted 1995

These principles are a model against which news and editorial staff members can measure their performance. They have been formulated in the belief that newspapers and the people who produce them should adhere to the highest standards of ethical and professional conduct.

The public's right to know about matters of importance is paramount. The newspaper has a special responsibility as surrogate of its readers to be a vigilant watchdog of their legitimate public interests.

No statement of principles can prescribe decisions governing every situation. Common sense and good judgment are required in applying ethical principles to newspaper realities. As new technologies evolve, these principles can help guide editors to insure the credibility of the news and information they provide. Individual newspapers are encouraged to augment these APME guidelines more specifically to their own situations.

Responsibility

- The good newspaper is fair, accurate, honest, responsible, independent and decent. Truth is its guiding principle.
- It avoids practices that would conflict with the ability to report and present news in a fair, accurate and unbiased manner.
- The newspaper should serve as a constructive critic of all segments of society. It should reasonably reflect, in staffing and coverage, its diverse constituencies. It should vigorously expose wrongdoing, duplicity or misuse of power, public or private. Editorially, it should

advocate needed reform and innovation in the public interest. News sources should be disclosed unless there is a clear reason not to do so. When it is necessary to protect the confidentiality of a source, the reason should be explained.

- The newspaper should uphold the right of free speech and freedom of the press and should respect the individual's right to privacy. The newspaper should fight vigorously for public access to news of government through open meetings and records.

Accuracy

- The newspaper should guard against inaccuracies, carelessness, bias or distortion through emphasis, omission or technological manipulation.

- It should acknowledge substantive errors and correct them promptly and prominently.

Integrity

- The newspaper should strive for impartial treatment of issues and dispassionate handling of controversial subjects. It should provide a forum for the exchange of comment and criticism, especially when such comment is opposed to its editorial positions. Editorials and expressions of personal opinion by reporters and editors should be clearly labeled. Advertising should be differentiated from news.

- The newspaper should report the news without regard for its own interests, mindful of the need to disclose potential conflicts. It should not give favored news treatment to advertisers or special-interest groups.

- It should report matters regarding itself or its personnel with the same vigor and candor as it would other institutions or individuals. Concern for community, business or personal interests should not cause the newspaper to distort or misrepresent the facts.

- The newspaper should deal honestly with readers and newsmakers. It should keep its promises.

- The newspaper should not plagiarize words or images.

Independence

- The newspaper and its staff should be free of obligations to news sources and newsmakers. Even the appearance of obligation or conflict of interest should be avoided.

- Newspapers should accept nothing of value from news sources or others outside the profession. Gifts and free or reduced-rate travel, entertainment, products and lodging should not be accepted. Expenses in connection with news reporting should be paid by the newspaper. Special favors and special treatment for members of the press should be avoided.

- Journalists are encouraged to be involved in their communities to the extent that such activities do not create conflicts of interest.

- Involvement in politics, demonstrations and social causes that would cause a conflict of interest, or the appearance of such conflict, should be avoided.

- Work by staff members for the people or institutions they cover also should be avoided.

- Financial investments by staff members or other outside business interests that could create the impression of a conflict of interest should be avoided.

- Stories should not be written or edited primarily for the purpose of winning awards and prizes. Self-serving journalism contests and awards that reflect unfavorably on the newspaper or the profession should be avoided.

About the Editors

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Stacy Lynch is project manager on the Editorial Leadership Initiative with the Newspaper Management Center at Northwestern University. She directs applied research and is in charge of the ELI management publication series and newsletter. Stacy also conducts the annual cost and revenue study of Latin American newspapers for the Inter American Press Association.

Michael P. Smith

Mike Smith is managing director of the Newspaper Management Center at Northwestern University. He is also director of the Editorial Leadership Initiative and NMC's Advanced Executive and Management Development seminars for senior media executives. A veteran of 25 years with Knight Ridder, Smith serves on the boards of the Center for Religion and the News Media and the American Association of Sunday and Feature Editors.