The Extraordinary Editor

A handbook for South African media leaders

Guy Berger and Elizabeth Barratt

This book is dedicated to the memory of Stephen Wrottesley, a champion of journalism and a Sanef stalwart.

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Contents

Chapter 3 Managing people

Chapter 4 Managing content and processes

Chapter 5 Managing business and bosses

Chapter 6 **Managing politics and publics**

Chapter 7 Managing change and convergence

Chapter 8 **Appendix** .....

Foreword

Jovial Rantao, Chairperson:
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The story of South Africa has changed dramatically in the past decade and a half – as has journalism and the challenges we face as we tell the story.

Fifteen years ago, the South African story was as simple and straight as a ruler: there were the oppressed masses and the oppressors. And the story always revolved around how the oppressed were fighting racial discrimination and how the oppressors in turn were trying to justify the unjustifiable.

Today, the South African story is very different.

From the unbanning of the ANC and other political formations, the release of Nelson Mandela, the elections, our first parliament to our constitution; the story has undergone myriad twists and turns – some at breakneck speed.

To be able to properly tell the complete story, editors and journalist have required special skills and commitment.

As this book goes to print, South Africa is preparing for its fourth general election. It's no normal election because the ruling party faces unprecedented challenges for the first time in its 98 years. The change of leadership at the party's Polokwane conference, where Thabo Mbeki was unseated as ANC president by Jacob Zuma, has unleashed a chain of events that no one foresaw.

For good measure, you can add the unedifying prospect of the country having a sitting president – Zuma – standing trial on corruption charges.

These stories – and that's not counting the challenges posed by poverty, the HIV/Aids pandemic and education – have meant that editors and journalists must not only keep up with the game but keep in front. They need to do this to better inform their audiences in an increasingly rich and diverse media environment.

These are the obvious challenges; the others are more subtle and insidious.

For one, our audiences, be they listeners, viewers or readers, are far more discerning, far more independent.

All hugely mobile, most can be identified by a cell phone in the one hand, an ipod in the other and a laptop in front of them at any given time.

To successfully cater for their needs, we must adapt

... and do so quickly. There is no middle ground; either we do so or we die.

Part of this adaption involves investing in multimedia platforms, a phenomenon that has forever changed the face of South African media as we knew it.

We are currently investigating ways and means in which the new and exciting platforms can be used to deepen the role of media in society.

It is heartening to note how a number of media houses have taken concrete steps to help journalists polish their craft and become increasingly professional in their conduct.

The major challenge, though, remains the reality that the growth of our industry has not been met with commensurate growth in our skills.

Not only must we fend off inter-publication poaching, but government departments and parastatals also have a hunger for our valuable skills, further emptying the barrel.

Sanef has published a number of manuals, from helping reporters deal with anonymous sources to reporting the courts. This latest initiative sets the bar even higher, providing editors and senior journalists with the skills to run their own news organisations by learning about the mistakes and successes of others in the university of life.

The editors and journalists chasing deadlines in our newsrooms are very special. They have every right to feel that way for they are living in a special time, a historic period in our country.

Their greatest role is not just telling this story, but rather keeping alive the tradition they inherited from their forebears in such a way that they can hand over the institution of journalism in this country to the next generation in an even better condition than when they received it.

We hope this handbook will go a long way to helping them do just that.

CHAPTER 1 **THE JOB**

Overview: the beginning

You've got the job. You've seen others doing it. You have some ideas of your own. Maybe you're a veteran in the chair and open to becoming even better. Now you're reading this book that's jam-packed with more ideas and helpful experiences.

It's a resource for anyone in an executive post in journalism: providing wit and wisdom on managing people, money, publics, technology and bosses. It also gives insight to outsiders who wonder what the job entails.

Underpinning the gems in these pages is a fundamental question: what's the purpose of being an editor?

Of course, there are differences according to whether you're talking a community or a mainstream newspaper, let alone a radio station or a website. But there are lots of general functions common to all editors.

And topmost is that of maintaining and improving editorial values – often in difficult environments that militate against these. Whether for reasons of time, resources, interference or inadequate staff, it's a tough call for editors to do justice to being curators of journalistic content.

In fulfilling that purpose, don't hesitate to call on people for help. Being active in the South African National Editors' Forum (Sanef) is one way to regularly network with supportive colleagues outside your company. Reading this book, and referring to it when need be, is another way. It's all about being not just a good editor, but a great one.

> "It's a tough call for editors to do justice to being curators of journalistic content."

First days

The Radio and Television News Directors Foundation in the US suggests a sequenced programme for new editors. Amend the plan below as suits your situation.

Week 1: Observation

- Spend time seeing how the newsroom functions, how scheduling works and what systems are in place.
- Survey newsroom staff about their hopes and hassles, and their expectations of you. Let them respond anonymously.
- Formulate your interim goals.
- Meet team leaders or editorial department heads to spell out your expectations.
- By the end of the week, meet the reporters as a group.

Week 2: Individual meetings

- Meet each staff member separately to discuss roles and get feedback on what works and what needs work.
- Spend a lot of time with the layer of leadership that reports directly to you.

Week 3: Feedback

- Meet the staff in a large group to feed back the results of your survey and your take on it.
- Have individual meetings with deputies and/or reporters that will be formally scheduled once a month to go over their work.
- Hold critique sessions regarding content that will continue weekly.

Week 4: Reinforcement

- Monitor progress on goals set out during Week 1.
- Hold a full staff meeting at the end of the week to see how everyone thinks things are going.
- Start working with people involved in presentation and packaging of the content.

Week 5: Be involved

- Work with the production shifts closely for several days and help improve planning and workflow.

Week 6: Fine-tuning

- Begin fuller reviews that will be held bi-weekly with senior staff.
- Involve them in looking at the competition.

Weeks 7 & 8: Monitoring and accountability

- Everyone should have a clear idea of what is expected. Those who aren't cutting it need reinforcing and to be told that they are accountable for getting up to speed.

– Guy Berger

(The Radio and Television News Directors Foundation is the educational arm of the Radio-Television News Directors Association, a professional organisation of electronic journalists in radio, television and all digital media, as well as journalism educators and students, based in the US. www.rtnda.org)

"Reporters convert facts to information. Editors convert information to knowledge. And great editors convert knowledge into wisdom."

– Neil Postman, 1997, American professor and media theorist.

MY EXPERIENCE

Coming in as an outsider

Jethro Goko

Editor of *The Herald* and *Weekend Post*

I cannot believe that it is five years since I left *Business Day*, where I was deputy editor, to take up the position of editor-in-chief of Avusa Media Eastern Cape.

Yes, time does fly when one is busy and having a good time – although my 14-year-old daughter put me down rather savagely the other day by linking my feeling of running out of time to being long in the tooth!

I learnt much and thoroughly enjoyed my five years at *Business Day*. But I can genuinely say that I am even happier today editing the 163-year-old regional daily, *The Herald*, and its sister publication, *Weekend Post* – even though I work harder and do longer hours.

The two titles are published from Port Elizabeth and circulate in the eastern and southern Cape.

But, if the truth be told, my early days in the job were not easy. Morale and confidence levels among my new colleagues were low and the business was not in solid shape at the time for a variety of reasons. The transition from my predecessor's era to mine also proved a lot more challenging than I had envisaged.

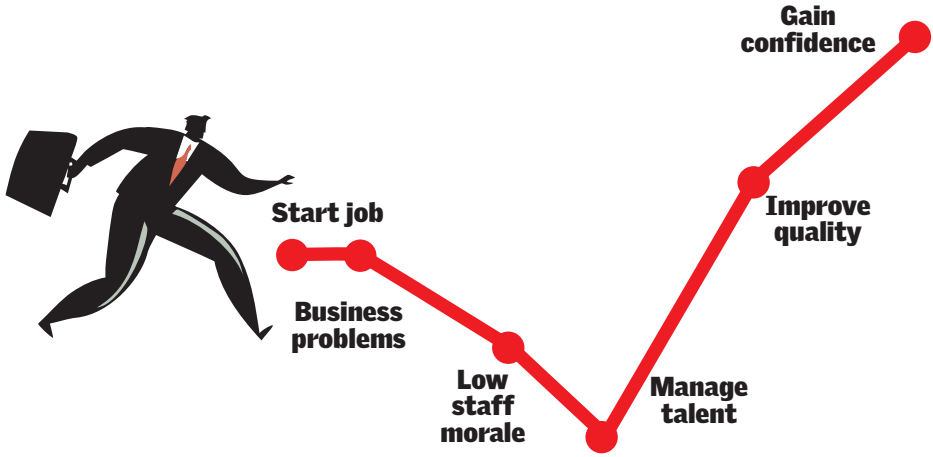
The good news is that we all eventually adjusted to the new demands, found the necessary balance and are now speeding ahead at full throttle. I want to believe that pound for pound our titles are currently among the best and most commercially viable newspapers in the country.

I have learnt two very important lessons in the past five years.

The first is that while the size and perceived prestige of titles are major issues for some journalists, our audiences frankly don't care a hoot about this: all they want is quality conversations and journalism – whether you are in Johannesburg or in Port Elizabeth.

The second is that leading newsrooms is largely about managing talent, egos and emotions. To that extent, one of the editor's biggest tasks is to make sure that s/he understands that they are dealing with human beings, not just news copy or brands.

If you lose the support and confidence of your colleagues, the editing job becomes a painful one. If you gain their confidence and trust, your top-dog position and influence is cemented – and you will have a long life!



Moving up in the company

Zingisa Mkhuma

Editor of the *Pretoria News*

No one ever tells their successor that the job they are excited about might nearly kill them, otherwise there wouldn't be any takers.

Be that as it may, even if briefed about a new job, the smartest thing to do is to interrogate your predecessor about the challenges ahead. You may get some truth, and more, if your predecessor has left the company; however, it would be naive to expect him or her to tell you the whole truth while they are still employed by the same group.

A great lesson for me was: don't believe everything you are told. You have to go into a leadership role without prejudice about the people you are going to lead. Be independent and show it from day one, and try and start on a clean slate.

I do a lot of consultation with my two mentors, one male and one female, who are outside the organisation. They have decades of media experience between them. It is important to have mentors, preferably including men if you are a woman. Newspapers, like the rest of corporate South Africa, are a men's domain: you need someone who speaks their language to advise and guide you.

The biggest issue is that suddenly you realise being at the helm means the buck now stops with you; you can't shift the blame any more. You also realise that the luxury and independence that previous editors enjoyed, which inspired us and for which we strove, has gone the way of the dodo.

Gone are the days of one national, dominant newspaper. Today's editors have to contend with bottom-line issues caused by shrinking advertising, and a migration of readers to other competitors including television, radio and internet. So it becomes a balancing act where one has to constantly strive not to compromise editorial independence in one's quest to grow the bottom line.

More than a decade ago we were taught, at the Argus School of Journalism, that newspapers make profits to stay independent. But now as an editor I can safely say newspapers have to make profits to stay in existence.

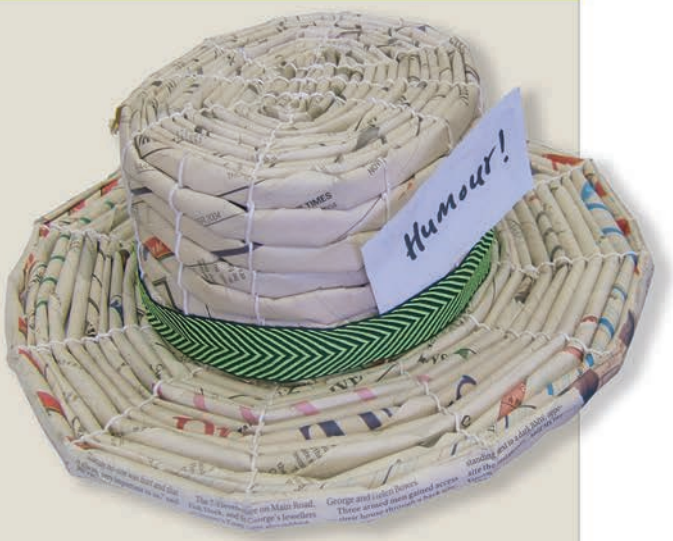
Suss out yourself before you start

1. **Define definite objectives**, and keep doing so: these will change as you go along, but you need to have a starting point if you're just coming into the job. What would you personally like to achieve in the post? Write it down as a list.

2. **Do a SWOT analysis** of yourself as editor: what are your strengths and weaknesses, and what opportunities and threats do you face out there? What special skill strengths do you have which will help you in this job: previous work experience, education and training, technical skills, editorial skills, communication skills, contact base? What experience do you lack, what negative personal characteristics do you need to watch (for example impatience, disorganisation)? On opportunities: what is it about this particular job or company that will help you achieve your goals? Threats: what conditions of the job might trip you up?

3. **Now focus on yourself** as a leader: where have you done well in the past, and where have you made mistakes or had problems? Go through any previous assessments

AS I SEE IT



I had shadowed an acting editor for almost three months, so my first day was not really a train smash. I knew where to start and that was striving to woo the staff and get them to work in sync with me, before I could introduce my visions and strategies.

I have learned from my short experience that editing a daily is like nothing you have read in textbooks. It requires flexibility, a bit of entrepreneurship, an open mind and managing on your feet. And you certainly won't survive without a sense of humour.

HANDY HINTS

or personality tests you have done. How do others see you as a leader: hard, soft, micro-manager, providing opportunities and giving confidence to others, or leading by downplaying or criticising others to make yourself look better? Are you best leading from the front or from the back – and how can you be flexible enough to do either of these depending on the occasion?

Pause and remind yourself of who you are, and who you want to be, before jumping in or blithely continuing as before.

– Elizabeth Barratt

"When I was first in the television business I used to respect those in high places in television because I thought 'they must know'. Having now done those jobs myself I realise my confidence in them was misplaced. No one knows: you just pretend to know. The great myth of management is that somehow you know more than those you are leading, whereas the only real advantage you've got is the position and the power."

– Greg Dyke, former director general of the BBC

Setting your leadership style

Khathu Mamaila

Editor of *City Press*

The curse of any good reporter is that he or she may eventually rise to become an editor. While being an editor is growth, it is quite different from being a reporter.

As an editor one is mainly confined to the office, commissioning and editing news reports instead of chasing sources for that scoop.

One of the first things I discovered in my new role was the difficulty of translating a brief into a story.

There was often a gap between what I had conceptualised and the final story. I felt I should have done the interview myself, as I would have got more facts from the sources. I frequently found that young reporters behaved like secretaries, taking notes without seriously engaging with the source – so when I asked them a pertinent question, the response was simply that: this is what the source said.

Furthermore, I generally felt the story could have been done better. At first I was tempted to speak to sources myself. I was also tempted to do a complete rewrite, often without involving the writer.

I later realised I was wanting to remain a reporter and not be an editor. If I were to try to do this with all the stories that the newspaper published, I would not be able to be an editor.

I began to brief the news editor more on what I thought the story should be about. I released the power of delegating authority. I just had to make sure he had a thorough understanding of the story, clear information on all the sources to be interviewed and, more critically, an awareness of the point of dispute which would be tested with all those involved.

It is not possible for anybody to write what is in my mind: I had to let go and accept that people will approach the same topic differently.

The critical thing was that I learned to do proper briefings and let go of the illusion that I was a reporter.

> "I later realised I was wanting to remain a reporter and not be an editor."

The other adjustment I had to make as a new editor was to actively develop an interest in the newspaper as a whole. For most of my reporting years, I was more interested in politics than anything else: there was a temptation to transform my paper into a political discussion forum. So I focused on other sections such as sport and lifestyle to ensure I addressed my shortcoming.

These are the three main things I think a new editor should do:

- Accept that he or she is no longer a reporter and **delegate** the work of news reporting. Refuse to write stories and even when information is received, pass it on to a reporter.
- Focus on the **broader issues** and try not to micro-manage news generation.
- Write a **column** to help readers understand his or her thinking about general issues. This helps to develop the character of the editor but, more importantly, gives the newspaper a soul.

HOW WE DO IT

Managing multiple titles

Esmare Weideman

Editor of *You*, *Drum* and *Huisgenoot*

If ever there was an opportunity to experience, communicate with, influence and reflect the lives of the full spectrum of South Africa's "Rainbow Nation", it is to edit the country's three highly influential mass-market weekly news and entertainment titles: *Huisgenoot*, *You* and *Drum*.

Naturally it poses many challenges, from the obvious time-management issues to the question of whether one editor can accurately interpret the needs of and deliver to three distinctly different target markets. We believe it entirely possible, provided you use some important tools. I would like to highlight two:

- We use our **market research** and other research tools such as TV audience ratings (ARs) to determine what is of interest to our readers. If we as an editorial team would love to feature an actress in a particular drama or soapie but the ARs show our target market doesn't watch that particular show, we don't feature the actress, finished en klaar.
- We regard our three editorial teams as a **microcosm** of our hugely varied target market. What gets them talking is often exactly what our target markets regard as important or interesting. In fact, on the odd occasion when I battle to make up my mind about, for example, whether a particular celebrity would be a popular cover face, I ask the secretaries: after all, they deal with our readers every day!

Editing multiple titles means you have access to a wealth of articles and images you can repackage for each magazine. Naturally an article on award-winning actress Brenda Ngxoli's antics on Strictly Come Dancing would be very differently packaged for *Huisgenoot*, whose readers don't know much about her, as compared to *Drum*, whose readers are familiar with her and would expect new information.

You could write a thesis on the different markets we cater for – ever wondered what the differences are between black South Africans who prefer *You* to *Drum*? But at their most basic, all three magazines have built their mass circulations on the unique human-interest articles that form such an important part of our editorial recipe and mix.

One editor, three distinct target markets: *You*, *Huisgenoot* and *Drum* magazines.

We all love a good story, whether we live in Krugersdorp or Khayelitsha. We love reading about the trials and tribulations of people, ordinary or famous. We cry with those who suffer, we are inspired by those who triumph over life's hardships. We like a peek into the lives of the rich and famous, we despair about crime and bad performances by our sporting teams.

And this human-ness, thank goodness, is the fabric that binds us all together.

New product in a special market

Philani Mgwaba

Editor of *Sunday Tribune*, founding editor of *Isolezwe* and adviser on *Isolezwe ngeSonto*

Preparing to launch a new title: Slienky Ntombela (left) and Lungile Ndlovu go through a dummy of *Isolezwe ngeSonto*.

Sceptics were many. They said it could not be done; the 100-year-old bi-weekly *Ilanga* was entrenched, there was no "culture of reading" in the Zulu market and the desire for a daily was just not there.

It was in this environment of widespread scepticism that *Isolezwe* was launched in April six years ago.

Today the title sells around 100 000 copies daily. A Sunday edition, *Isolezwe ngeSonto*, has been launched, to great reader reception.

I'd spent nine years on *The Mercury* – two and a half as news editor – and done stints at a television station and a PR firm. This background stood me in good stead for the challenge ahead. During those first few years I visited ad agencies with sales reps, badgered our circulation division for new distribution routes and pushed our marketing team for more exposure and activity.

My conviction that the venture would succeed was based on my understanding of the people of KwaZulu-Natal. Born in a Durban township, I had also had the privilege of spending a great deal of my youth in rural Zululand – an experience which gave me invaluable insight into issues of importance and relevance to rural folk. This was also critically important in a politically divided province, split between the ANC and IFP.

To succeed, *Isolezwe* had to convince the target market, through its editorial content, that it was politically independent. It had to avoid being seen as the mouthpiece of a political party, and be the voice of the people.

So if a government minister was opening a new clinic in an area, the focus of the coverage would not be on him. Instead, we would seek the views of the residents, letting them tell us what the clinic meant to them: how it improved their lives, if that was the case. If promises were not kept, *Isolezwe* was the forum to air grievances to indifferent officialdom. It was always about ordinary South Africans, not the powerful.

Reporters were encouraged to get out of the office and report from the scene. This built contacts but also, more importantly, helped us get the story right. This earned *Isolezwe* enormous credibility and trust.

Though part of the Independent Group, language meant we could not fully benefit from being in a large company. We could not just lift stories, say from *The Star*. And even when a sister newspaper had a story of interest to our readers, an *Isolezwe* reporter would often have to find a suitable angle. Relevance was the watchword for every story.

We took the views of our readers seriously, and acted on them. Periodic reader research to establish our content relevance was an ongoing project. Before launch, potential readers had told us what they wanted to read. Their views formed the bedrock of *Isolezwe's* editorial recipe. The rest, as they say, is history.

MANAGEMENT VS LEADERSHIP

What you need to lead

It's possible to be a good leader without being a good manager, or to be a good manager who isn't a leader. The two roles have different designations. But they are usually complementary and mutually reinforcing.

In some views, the difference is that management involves power by position, while leadership relies on influence. Another distinction is that management involves minimising risk, while leadership optimises opportunity. Evidently, there is a need for both capacities in the ranks of a media company.

Despotic

Leadership identities

To be an editor is to adopt a general role and an identity that goes with it. In the course of a single day, any editor is likely to interpret these in a range of different ways dependung on the issue at hand. However, there may still be an overall consistent style of leadership. The five styles below are caricatures, but it is helpful to contrast them and be aware of the limits and potentials in each:

Despotic: Here an editor sees him or herself as a commander and the newsroom as an entity that requires orders. In this dictatorial model, responsibility and initiative are concentrated in the editorship.

Walkover: An editor here is subordinate to the newsroom. Personally indecisive, he/she creates a power vacuum that destroys morale or is filled by a strong subordinate.

Populist: This editor uses charisma and authority to be the source of gravity and champion of the newsroom, but without ever straying from its ethos or making contrary decisions.

Bureaucratic: This kind of editor stresses systems and policies as supreme, is seldom seen at the coalface and is distant from the people working there.

Consultative: An editor here takes decisions, but first solicits and respects colleagues' opinions on various issues and avoids undermining their level of responsibility. This creates a flexibility and openness that is absent in the other models of leadership.

The value of the last style is that it avoids the ego-driven model of an editor, where the newsroom bears the unmistakeable stamp of a single individual. In bestowing his or her personality on the media institution, this ego-model editor is indeed distinctive – but a good journalistic news operation can't depend on the drive or talent of a single actor.

Walkover

Getting results of others

"Management of media organisations is something of a special case because it involves the management of creativity," writes John Prescott Thomas in his *Broadcaster's Media Management Manual*. The implication, in his view, is that encouraging such people is

easy; controlling them can be a problem. "So how can we keep the operation on the road without inhibiting the creativity which is essential to success?" His answer, in effect, is that leadership needs management – there have to be some limits on time and effort.

A long-standing textbook view of management is "getting results out of other people". The value of this aphorism is in setting up an editor in the role of choreographer. The image requires him or her to realise that the job is less about the self than about the performance of others. It reminds editors to reduce the tendency to try and do it all themselves.

To fulfil such an executive responsibility, a good editorial manager will pay attention to what is often summed up as PLOC.

That is:

- **Planning:** thinking ahead and preparing staff for what's coming up.
- **Leading:** prioritising, taking decisions, initiating change, motivating, holding aloft the vision, mission and values.
- **Organising:** co-ordinating optimum use of human, financial and technical resources.
- **Controlling:** monitoring progress, acting on problems, rewarding successes.

Understanding these areas of activity is helpful for focusing on what it means to manage. But be aware that it's a very goal-oriented approach.

Balance it by remembering the **human side**: instead of emphasising the extraction of performance, keep a focus on recognising and developing talent and achievement. The quality of relationships is what underpins the output of product, meaning that an editor as manager should be more of a facilitator than a foreman.

Bureaucratic

Populist

Consultative

Understand your power

This comes from:

- **Your stripes:** this is the power deriving from your position; you are the boss over other people because your bosses have appointed you to that disciplinary responsibility.
- **Your "sweets":** you have power to allocate resources (including symbolic ones like rewarding people with compliments, or conversely withholding praise and administering "sours").
- **Your smarts:** this power comes from your expertise (although if you don't share this resource, you will end up doing everything yourself).
- **Your synergy:** this is the extent to which people believe in and benefit from you, and refer to you.

Moral of the story? Be sensitive to your mix – don't overdo the first two (stripes and sweets) and don't neglect the others (smarts and synergy).

– Guy Berger

(Adapted from Gill Geisler, Poynter Institute, and www.rtndf.org/trades/managing.shtml#00)

SCAFFOLDING FOR SUCCESS

Career paths to becoming an editor

Many young people, in their first interview for a junior reporter's job, are asked: where do you see your journalism career going, what beat or area do you hope to move up to, and what is your long-term goal?

And many answer: I want to be editor in five years' time.

Sorry, but the path to being appointed editor is much longer than that.

Besides building a reputation as a good journalist and a wide range of contacts, any aspirant editor must realise there are many other skills to be collected before an employer will consider them for the top job.

On top of news judgement and editorial production skills, which take years to master, there are the essential leadership, staff management, production, administration, budgeting and business skills, and a wide knowledge of media in general, to be acquired. Many of these are described in this book.

However, the "basket" of knowledge, skills and attributes needed to become an editor – the career path needed – cannot be predicted with total certainty.

There are also personality factors, some kind of "fit" between you and your employer or prospective employer, and then just being in the right place at the right time.

And then there's the issue of whether you are looking at a small or niched editor's job, which can take less time to get to, or the job of editor of a major publication or station, which will most likely take much longer.

A quick look at two editors' actual career paths (see boxes) sheds some light on the kind of career choices to be made and how long it takes to fill that "basket" with experience:

In general, there are six or seven stages to becoming the editor of a large station or publication.

Some of them might overlap or be in a different order, but on average each stage is likely to last three to five years.

A. National newspaper editor:	
Freelance	1 year
Bureau reporter	2 years
Bureau chief	6 years
Investigations editor	2 years
Political editor	4 years
Deputy editor (weekly)	1 year
Deputy editor (daily)	2 years
Deputy editor (broadcasting)	1 year
Editor	

B. National new media editor:	
Radio reporter (general)	4 years
Senior radio reporter	4 years
Parliamentary reporter (radio and TV)	4 years
Specialist radio reporter (in-depth programmes)	2 years
Assignment editor (radio and TV)	2 years
Regional editor	8 years
Editor	

Stages to becoming an editor:

1. **General news reporting** – do everything (courts, crime, sports etc) to get a good grounding.
2. **Specialisation** – find a good niche or beat and develop in-depth expertise.
3. **Multiskilling** – cross over to another medium (optional but advised in this multimedia world).
4. **Supervising other staff** – responsible not just for stories but for the output of a small team.
5. **Managing a section** – responsible for staff management and all content for a wider area.
6. **Deputy editor** – second-in-command of all staff and the whole product.
7. **Editor**

Of course there are many more junior reporters in the media than editors, so not everyone can reach the top job. But if you do, it's worth having those years of experience and expertise behind you.

– Elizabeth Barratt

Doing it on community papers

Karin Espag

Editor of the *Rekord*, Forum of Community Journalists chair 2006-8

Everybody knows that a newsroom revolves around deadlines. The more editions, or more pages, the more the available staff members have to do and the more diverse their tasks become.

This is possibly even more so at the community newspaper, where a limited number of editorial staff have to do everything from taking photographs to writing stories, editing each other's stories, page layouts, proof reading and even advertising design, all the while keeping the deadlines in mind ... and meeting them.

The editor has to ensure the system runs like clockwork while performing their own editorial and management tasks.

To achieve this, it is important to prioritise and distinguish between what is important and what is urgent. Focusing on either of the two upsets the balance.

A "to do" list, with deadlines, will assist in achieving this. Then:

- Start any task as soon as possible; avoid procrastination or delays.
- Determine what is required.
- Carry out the necessary research and gather information before finally putting it all together.
- Plan for problems that may arise and have alternative strategies and contingency plans in place.

Unfortunately your own deadlines are just that: your own. Others will not necessarily give one of your deadlines the respect you believe it deserves.

Priorities can also change, and usually do – just when one is deep in concentration and on the verge of solving a challenge, or have just worked your ideas out.

A reporter/production manager/advertising manager with an important problem will require your immediate attention. You need to retain a presence of mind and shift your focus, never forgetting what you were busy with. Always return to that project as soon as possible.

There is, however, one specific trap all editors should be wary of: taking on too many tasks and thereby broadcasting a message of distrust to the newsroom.

Editors sometimes try to do too much in order to save time – they may have done something many times before and believe they know the best way to do it. They then carry out the task themselves and deprive their staff of the chance to learn and realise their full potential.

This behaviour possibly stems from the high staff turnover that community newspapers experience (reasons for this are part of a different debate). The strict deadlines newspapers operate under create a fast, no-nonsense and merciless environment where many a job needs to be done *now*.

An editor may believe they are the best person to do it, which may be true today but could prove a costly decision tomorrow: a reporter/photographer/sub/designer may be required to do the same job in the absence of the editor, and will not know how.

Organised chaos at the office has the potential of becoming even more intense as we embrace the inevitable conversion to an integrated newsroom.

It is imperative that everyone understands the requirements and pre-requisites prior to implementation, so effective decisions which will affect the staff's understanding of deadlines can be made. Editors need to accept, though, that this will not make the multi-tasking any easier.

On values: what is important to you

Joe Thloloe

South Africa's Press Ombudsman

Two people are shown a litre bottle containing 500ml of brandy. The first person reports that the bottle is half full and the second that it is half empty. The two are not giving us information about the bottle and the brandy only; they are probably also telling us something about themselves: what is important to them, their values.

The first probably does not drink or drinks only socially: the bottle has little emotional meaning to him. The second is probably an alcoholic because when her brandy reaches that mark, she panics as she starts to worry about her next bottle.

Of course, a chemist will try and extricate herself from what she is seeing by reporting that there are 500ml of brandy in a litre bottle.

What is true of the reports on the brandy is also true of our decision-making as editors and journalists. The decisions we make tell the world about our values, and who we are is the sum of the choices we have made through our lives and in our profession.

Your diary conference is told by the investigations editor that one of his reporters is working on a forensic report that has recommended the commercial crimes unit of the South African Police Service be brought in to investigate Mr X, the husband of your wife's best friend.

You don't count Mr X as your friend: you've had a few drinks with him when he came to fetch his wife from your home or when you picked up your wife from his home; you've chatted about the state of the city and the nation; and you've been at a picnic with him when you were dragged along by your wives.

Do you tell the diary conference about your relationship with Mr X?

Do you oversee the story because your policy is that investigative stories need to be supervised by the highest executives in the newsroom, or do you let your deputy take charge because of your relationship with Mr X?

When you get home, do you tell your wife/husband about the story and ask her to cool down her friendship with Mrs X?

How do you behave the next time you see Mr X?

On the story itself, do you send it back to the reporter time and again just to stall it, or is it because you are as meticulous as you should be, particularly with such a story?

And, finally, what do you say to an angry Mr X when he phones to complain that your journalist is asking him "stupid" questions?

Your answers to these questions define your values, what is important to you as an editor.

These questions should not be asked in the heat of action – you need to set aside time regularly to reflect on your values as an editor, as a journalist.

The more we think about these values, the easier it gets to make swift ethical decisions in the newsroom's non-stop battle to beat deadlines.

(Thloloe is a veteran print and television journalist who has not hesitated to go against the flow, or even sacrifice job security, rather than compromise ethical principles.)

Doing things through others

Mary Papayya

KZN Bureau Chief, *Sowetan*, former editor in print and radio, newsroom trainer

In my experience as a newsroom manager I have learnt that leadership is not about telling people what to do, but about guiding, growing and nurturing individual talent. It is about taking a firm but passive position and putting in place all the necessary tools and systems so that the job gets done without personally taking charge.

As a manager it may be tempting to lead through instruction and command, with the focus on just getting things done as swiftly as possible. This is an option that can blind you to the real concerns and needs of those around you. It can hold you back from collectively discovering new ways of doing things and prevent you from learning from those you lead.

The option of guiding leadership, on the other hand, provides a bird's eye view of the news environment as a whole. Here things get done even when you are not personally involved. I found this process a lot more encouraging for the team.

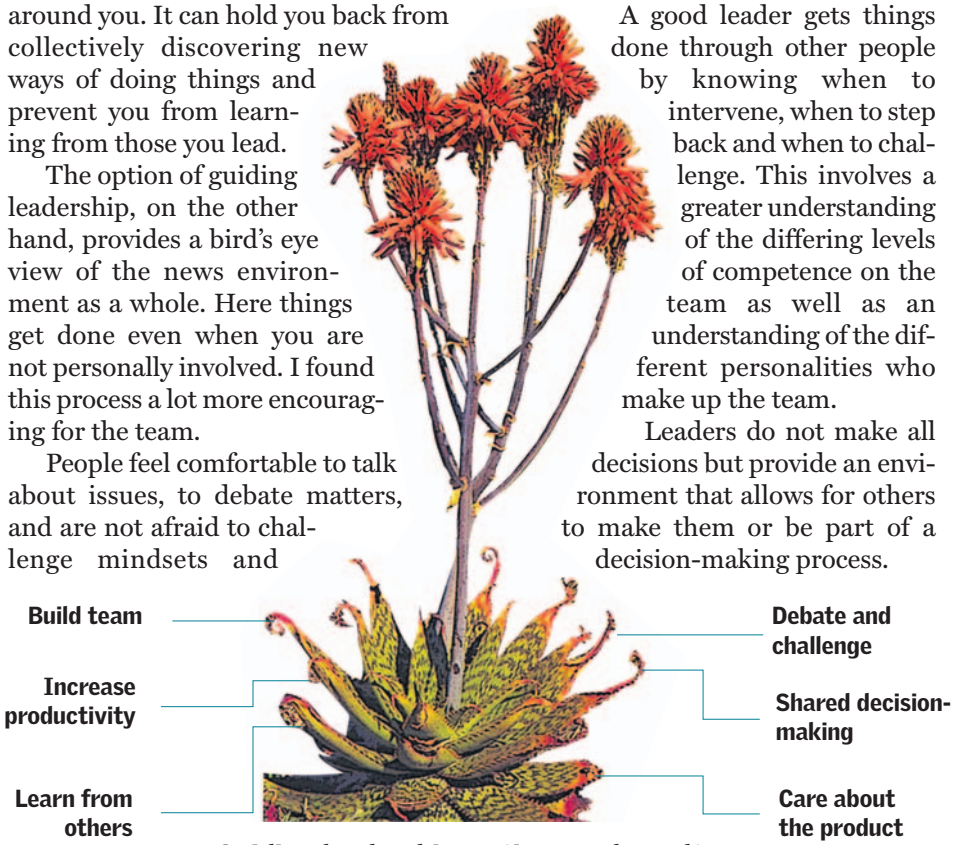
People feel comfortable to talk about issues, to debate matters, and are not afraid to challenge mindsets and speak out about everything and anything. They feel they have a vested interest in the final product. As a consequence, productivity levels increase and there is a common purpose that holds the team together, even when things get tough. Respect and responsibility are the key drivers all round.

Journalism is an environment containing individuals who are creative. Typical of creative animals, emotions can run high and, coupled with the push for deadlines, the potential for a flare-up is real. The last thing any newsroom leader needs is to use the traditional management style of power to bring things to order. This only makes matters worse.

In my newsroom, where diversity of cultures, racial integration and language are always a challenge, good leadership has been without a doubt the better option.

A good leader gets things done through other people by knowing when to intervene, when to step back and when to challenge. This involves a greater understanding of the differing levels of competence on the team as well as an understanding of the different personalities who make up the team.

Leaders do not make all decisions but provide an environment that allows for others to make them or be part of a decision-making process.



Guiding leadership: actions and results

DAILY ORGANISATION

Building some balance

Being an editor is pretty much a full-time job: seven days a week, all your waking hours.

You can get phone calls or have to attend informal and formal meetings any time. You are confronted by criticism or story ideas at every turn – you will feel that your mind has to always be on the job.

To remain creative, stimulated and flexible is difficult if you feel you never have enough time for all your responsibilities.

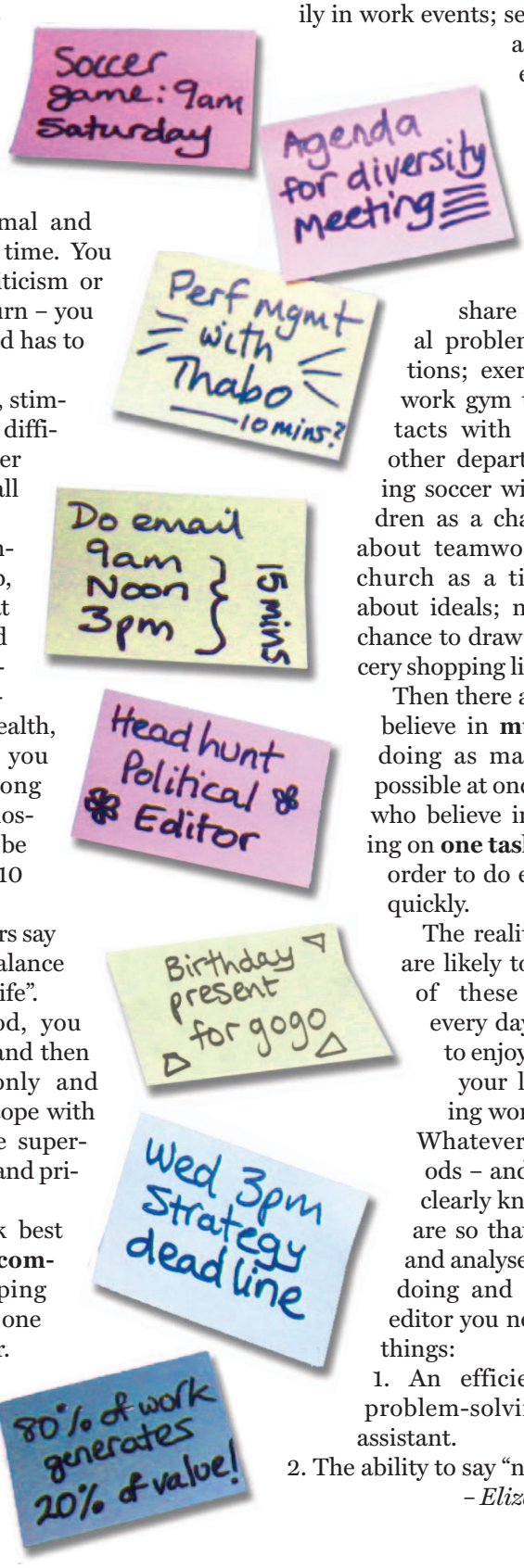
And if you concentrate only on your job, the responsibilities that end up being neglected can damage your commitments to your family, friends, exercise, health, religion, sleep. But you need these in the long term; it is not worth losing them in order to be an editor for five or 10 years of your life.

Some career advisers say you need to find a balance between "work" and "life".

Using this method, you would put work first and then set aside personal-only and family-only time. To cope with work, you need to be super-organised, create lists and prioritise items.

Some people work best this way: **creating compartments** and keeping boundaries. Work on one side, "life" on the other.

Others prefer the method of **integrating all** the areas of their lives: involving their family in work events; seeing holidays as a time to explore the country and come up with story ideas; talking to friends as a time to share organisational problems and solutions; exercising at the work gym to build contacts with people from other departments; playing soccer with their children as a chance to learn about teamwork; going to church as a time to think about ideals; meetings as a chance to draw up their grocery shopping list on the side.



Then there are those who believe in **multitasking** – doing as many things as possible at once – and those who believe in concentrating on **one task at a time** in order to do each well and quickly.

The reality is that you are likely to combine all of these approaches every day, if you want to enjoy all aspects of your life ... including work.

Whatever your methods – and you need to clearly know what they are so that you can see and analyse what you are doing and how – as an editor you need two more things:

1. An efficient, flexible, problem-solving personal assistant.
2. The ability to say "no".

– Elizabeth Barratt

Slaying your time monster

"When does your working week start?" is a question the retired general manager of *The Star*, Jolyon Nuttall, likes to ask at workshops for editors.

He gets a range of answers: from "at 8am on Monday" to "as a Sunday paper, we get Mondays off, so our kick-off is at 9am on Tuesdays".

These responses don't satisfy him. "No," he says, "You have to start the night before – if you're going to hit the ground running when your actual working day begins."

He also tells editors: be brutal in sticking to schedule. If you run late in one meeting, you cascade inconvenience and time-wasting to others throughout the rest of the day. Everyone has to wait because you let one thing run late.

Pareto principle: 80% of your work generates only 20% of the value.

Tips on time management

Measuring time on the 24/7 clock is a modern phenomenon, like treating it as a factor of production. African time is not necessarily an insult: it means that events happen without schedule, and continue as long as it takes. Even in industry, that's sometimes necessary.

So managing time is cultural and debatable: it's not a god. That's exactly why you can make time work for you, rather than vice versa.

Read this tip-list and see what works for you. Avoid easy illusions like: "If I can only get rid of the backlog ..."

- Get your weekly and daily priorities clear, then use a to-do list to arrange your schedule and the allocation of time periods accordingly.
- Juggle according to what's both important AND urgent.
- But don't lose sight of what's impor-

ANSWER THIS

Yes-men & women

Recognise yourself in these underlying reasons for why you can't say "no"?

1. I want to be helpful.
2. I don't want to cause offence.
3. I want to be involved in everything.
4. Doing things makes me feel important.
5. If I say no, I won't be liked.
6. I like being stretched.
7. Other people won't take no for an answer.

The result: you become trapped in time pressure.

(From Atkinson, J. 1992. Better time management. London: Thorsons.)

HANDY HINT

Measure your time

Estimate in percentages where your time goes:

A. EXTERNAL

- ☐ Public relations

B. STAFF

- ☐ Recruitment
- ☐ Evaluating performance and negotiating with staff
- ☐ Co-ordinating editorial leadership team
- ☐ Supervising journalists

C. STRATEGY

- ☐ Research and project development

D. BUSINESS-RELATED

- ☐ Marketing, circulation or audience ratings, advertising etc

100% TOTAL

tant, even if it's not yet burning. Factor in attention to those issues BEFORE they hit the light-flashing stage. Time spent on preparation is the best way to save time.

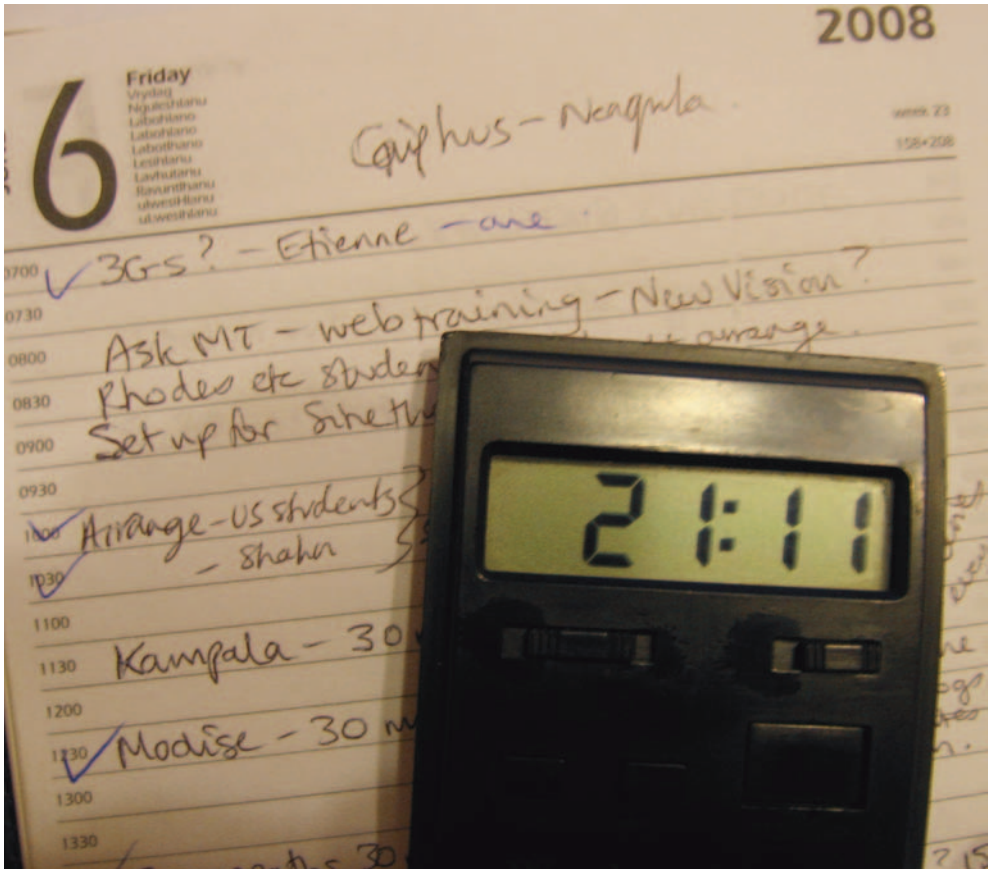
- Most things take longer than anticipated (even up to 50%); so budget in some fat.
- Often it looks quicker to do something yourself than delegate. No, no, no! That might be true for each individual activity, but as a whole you cannot do it all. It's a false shortcut to take it on. Delegating – even to people slower than you – ultimately saves time. But remember that delegation isn't dumping work on people whose job descriptions do not allow for it. Instead, it is using your team at the appropriate levels of responsibility.
- Don't procrastinate over unpleasant tasks: schedule them high in your to-do list; use the nice stuff as your reward for completion.
- Get your kicks from achieving a lot over a longer period, rather than from the transient pleasure of results under extreme pressure.
- Bunch your tasks: like doing email in a few bursts, rather than as a piecemeal distraction. Concentration is usually more productive than trying to multi-task through rapid shifts of focus.
- Never enter a meeting without an agenda and a time limit. And don't end a meeting without registering outcomes

MORE HINTS

Secrets for creating time

1 Be clear about everyone's expectations: who should do what ... *and by when*.
2 Schedule the important things and stick to them: at least, by the end of the day, you should feel you made some progress.
3 Use routine meetings and conversations to get more mileage out of time spent. For instance, use social occasions to solicit ideas, give feedback, clarify expectations – on top of the particular business at hand.
4 Invest in relationships with colleagues. Poor relationships are among the worst time stealers.
5 Being organised is important but not a guarantee of effectiveness. It is a means, not an end. You may be getting most tasks done, but you need to ask about their centrality to your role. (According to the Pareto principle, 80% of your work generates only 20% of the value – don't be a complacent prisoner of that ratio).
6 Prioritise your tasks in terms of your role. For instance, as regards attending meetings or replying to email: what is (a) essential; (b) important but can be delegated; (c) a waste of time. If you must be a perfectionist (rather than "good enough"), reserve that effort only for the essential.
7 If you do other people's jobs, you will neglect yours. Be clear to everyone about the scope of your job. Defend your time accordingly.

(drawn from Butch Ward, The Poynter Institute)



QUIZ

Assess yourself

Rate yourself with a number:
"totally agree" = 5 ... through to "not in my case" = 1.

1. I'm rushed off my feet. ☐
2. I can't find the necessary info/papers/folders. ☐
3. I communicate with staff mainly by email, not in person. ☐
4. By end of week, I'm totally wiped out. ☐
5. There's no time to pause for big-picture thinking. ☐

Results:

20 – 25: time is managing you, rather than vice versa.
15-20: choose one time guzzler and kill it.
10-15: tweak your timing across the board.
5 – 10: teach time management to the rest of us.
0 – 5: you're fabricating!

and possible follow-ups.
- Specifically plan for things other than work! Don't hit a weekend without at least one thing scheduled to get your head "out of shop".
- Skim read – and underline or annotate key points.
- Run an efficient gatekeeping system so people can be referred elsewhere for attention where possible.
- Drink ... water. The more dehydrated you are, the more you get fatigued.

How tech can help

- Get a desktop search programme (for example Windows Desktop) that saves you having to remember which folder or email a document is stored in.
- Download valuable audio content (such as BBC podcasts, or post-cabinet briefings at http://www.info.gov.za/speeches/cabinet/index.html) to an MP3 player and listen to them while commuting.
- See "Get wired" for more tips – it's on page 32.

– Guy Berger

EFFECTIVE MEETING SKILLS

Managing while chairing

As an editor, one thing is for certain: you are going to lead and attend a lot of meetings. You might as well become a maestro.

Many of these meetings will be within your own media company – though the principles described here also apply to external meetings of whatever type.

So let's look internally. There are the regular editorial meetings, usually news conferences with your senior managers, perhaps leader conferences. Some meetings are about news and content, others about strategies and procedures. There might be daily, weekly or monthly company meetings with top heads of editorial and other departments, and perhaps you regularly meet your board.

Whatever meeting you are at, you are The Editor – and as such you will have the opportunity, and be expected, to provide leadership.

In the chair

As editor, at any editorial meeting you should ensure:

- The **purpose** of the meeting is clear.
- Everyone has the **agenda** or, in the case of news conferences, the news diary.
- There is a set **time limit**, so everyone can plan the rest of their day.
- Time is **not wasted.** Information shared is good, practical and clear – and circulated in advance as much as possible.
- **Protocol** is clear. Is attendance optional? Is arriving late and leaving early acceptable? Can you interrupt other people or must everything go through the chair?

TRY THIS

Improve meetings

- Good meeting protocol involves "keeping conversation focused, holding to a time limit and ending each work session with 'action items' to be achieved before the next session".
- Rotate the responsibility of serving as chairperson.
- Appoint different people to take minutes.
- End meetings with a review of action items.

(From Williams, V. 2007. All eyes forward. How to help your newsroom get to where it wants to go faster.)

Leading while meeting

Your role as editor is also to lead in meetings – meaning that you:

- Promote discussion and off-beat ideas so that "bigger picture" inductive and deductive reasoning happens (this is what gives any media the edge).
- Provide leadership and vision – give clear direction, even if it means summarising what you might think is obvious.
- Ensure that opinions are sought from all attendees (especially important regarding age, race and gender) and that respect is shown for their ideas.

As editor, editorial meetings are also an opportunity for you to share (and repeat) information as you go along: mention latest audience data; restate the strategy and explain how it should be applied; tell your staff about developments in the media nationally and internationally.

You are their connection to the wider world of the company, media businesses and media changes. And you need to continually repeat the wider world information so that all can internalise it.

Keep in mind the **aim** of editorial meetings: they should be making work easier and clearer, and production better and faster.

If the meetings are practical, such as news conferences, they need to provide a leap forward. If necessary, send someone out to find the information needed, so that the quality of the decisions made is higher than if things are discussed in a vacuum.

News conference at *Grocott's Mail*

Train others

At times you will use meetings to informally train other editorial leaders: get others to plan meetings and tell you what role you should play, or to regularly run meetings.

It is unfair to let them just sink or swim; give them feedback so they can improve and feel appreciated.

Any editorial manager at a meeting should:

- Project her/his voice clearly.
- Look around and meet eyes.
- Talk more than read.
- Listen and then abstract and sum up key points.
- Share and promote his/her ideas.
- Be able to back up his/her opinions.

Staff meetings

Some media have regular meetings with all staff, others just have these when there is a serious reason: changes in direction or strategy, company announcements, awards received, changes and deaths.

In all of these, staff should be given a chance to ask questions, and as editor you should provide leadership and direction so staff feel safe and understand that you are in control.

Briefings

Informational briefings are usually provided by people outside editorial and cover diverse topics: feedback on an audience survey, the introduction of a new performance management system, a change in content strategy.

You need to consider what leadership role you must play in each of these. As an editor once said: "These staff are your chickies – you need to do what is best to raise them well."

Providing your editorial staff with as much information as possible is the best thing you can do with people who thrive on information. So if the briefings are worthwhile, make it possible for everyone to attend – if necessary, make it compulsory. But do not waste their time!

And where possible, even if it is just in an email to all staff, add your thoughts and perspectives on how this briefing relates to their jobs.

Wherever you can, provide the bridge between ideas and work. Challenge, involve and stimulate your editorial staff, as this is a great motivator.

– Elizabeth Barratt

GETTING ORGANISED

Why you need a good PA

Too many editors have shoddy reputations as being disorganised, unresponsive and downright rude. They say they will attend events, but do not appear.

If that's you, is it because you don't manage your PA to maximum effect?

Alternatively, are you not letting yourself be managed by your PA – or don't you have the best person for the job?

A smart editor recognises your PA helps to keep you focused. That's by letting that person act as an extension of you and arrange your life so you concentrate on where you really add value.

To work effectively, you need to develop high mutual trust and information flow with a PA. On their side, the PA has to work to know the company inside out – plus all the people with whom you deal. Maturity is a requisite, due to the many confidential matters they become privy to. Financial literacy is a must, as are Powerpoint skills.

Here are the optimum tasks that a PA should be doing for you:

1. Diary management

Ensure all your meetings – personal, professional, work, medical etc – are on a single calendar (meaning also that you have to keep the PA informed, on a daily or more frequent basis).

Make sure your meetings don't clash and rearrange schedule if need be.

The PA must continuously check in with you to remind you of commitments, help make last-minute changes and advise your interlocutors of cancellations.

2. Gatekeeping

A major part of the job is telephone and email interception: finding out what a caller or mailer wants, and answering directly or knowing when to refer the issue elsewhere. It means taking accurate messages and keeping a database of contact details.

This means that a PA has to exercise judgement beyond that of a receptionist or secretary. In order for the person to make decisions in the way you want, you have to give ongoing feedback so he/she can accurately anticipate your thinking. That's the way to get a PA aligned to your assessment of priorities and know which issues should get onto your desk.

3. Communication

The PA should be able to do competent correspondence on your behalf, and should also know the protocol (for example how to address a president). Tact and diplomacy are requisite skills. For instance, if there's an unavoidable change of plan about you attending an occasion that has been RSVP'd, your PA needs to be able to apologise on your behalf – sincerely and timeously.

4. Representing you

The PA should be skilled enough to make visitors feel welcome and informed. In your absence, they should be able to make certain decisions. But the incumbent should also know when to refer to you – and not be afraid to do so.

5. Travel arrangements

Your PA should be able to interpret this function in a strategic way – finding ways to save time (and money), and helping prepare relevant information/decisions for you to work on while you're on the road.

6. Project support

Any good PA should be able to take strategic minutes and produce relevant memoranda.

A related skill is research (for example googling a subject or person) and being able to produce a useful briefing document.

In general, the job of a PA may entail supervising second-level secretarial support. It needs to be well-rewarded so that incumbents can be legitimately called on to supply services at short notice or after hours. *– Guy Berger*

Studying while editing

Kevin Ritchie
Managing editor, *Saturday Star*

If being an editor isn't daunting enough, human beings have an in-built mechanism to make things even more difficult.

The symptom normally presents itself about 18 months into an editorship. If you read this and understand, you will know the best possible treatment is to take two Disprins and lie down until the feeling passes.

If when you wake up in the morning the nagging need to study persists, don't call a doctor: find a colleague who has gone through it and speak to them.

In all seriousness, South Africa has three excellent schools of journalism offering invigorating post-graduate courses in journalism, media studies or media management. They're all internationally recognised and would look terribly impressive on your CV. There are also countless other opportunities to study in totally different directions, if you are in the throes of a full-blown midlife crisis.

Studying is important. I never formally studied journalism and woke up one day to find myself being paid to guide "proper" journalists who had. And, if I'm honest, I always felt a bit of an imposter.

Going back to university helps dramatically. You meet others, including "proper" journalists, who also feel the need to extend themselves intellectually. Perhaps most important is the opportunity to cut yourself some time away from everything and debate exactly what this thing called journalism is that gets us up every morning.

But beware: they don't give the qualifications away. You might get in on the sniff of an academic oil rag because of your work experience, but that's it. Everything else takes application, dollops of it, and the longer you've been out of the classroom the rustier your mind is.

You'll also find out about the gulf between working as a journalist and debating the philosophies of media. Journalism is a trade; media studies is a full-on multi-disciplinary academic field with truly big words and long sentences that 20-year-olds rattle off in their sleep and 40-year-olds read with their fingers as their lips move.

In the end, if you do apply yourself, you will emerge refreshed and hugely enriched … even though you might not graduate.

Do not be disheartened. It's the journey, not the destination, that's important.

(Ritchie is a proud drop-out from Rhodes University's School of Journalism and Media Studies master's programme.)

> What I knew for certain was that the traditional leadership model based on exaggerated status, self-importance, and bossing ordinary people around was over. It was obsolete. Expecting people to deliver because you, as their boss, told them to do so didn't work any more, and was certainly not the way to get the best out of staff.
>
> – Greg Dyke, former director general of the BBC

MY EXPERIENCE

Suddenly being a public persona

Lizette Rabe

Chair, department of journalism at Stellenbosch University

Traditionally, journalists are the ones who observe the world from behind notebooks and pens, cameras and computers. Watching closely, reporting the here and now of our world.

But what happens when you become the observed? When you are, literally, suddenly in front of the camera? This is what happens to journalists when appointed editor of a magazine, especially those with the adjective "glossy".

Suddenly you are confronted with a posing, smiling you in every issue of the title for which you carry the heavy burden of being the custodian of the brand, not only sustaining (hopefully, increasing) circulation but also "servicing" the advertising fraternity.

You become the public face of Magazine X. And, whether you like it or not, you become public property.

Magazines are by nature publications with which their readers – "consumers" – identify. As research confirms, the magazine becomes part of their lives and their lifestyles. Ergo: you are part of the family.

But those demands on your physical self are nowhere near as heavy as the demands on your own identity in terms of you, the journalist.

Your magazine has a certain positioning with regard to demo- and psychographics, which might mean you have to adopt a somewhat different persona. How far can you challenge readers without jeopardising your precious and hard-worked-for circulation?

This responsibility can become an issue that you have to consciously engage with.

As custodian of the brand you have to put the interests of the title first. This might mean that you have to downplay your own (for example feminist) take on life, and present instead a softer "women's rights" face, so as not to intimidate a specific market.

Worse is when you have to take a decision that has to do with principles. The fact that I was editor of an Afrikaans title effectively meant I could not testify before the Truth and Reconciliation Commission: it would mean circulation suicide because the Afrikaans press vilified the commission in the eyes of their readers. You simply have to put your responsibility towards the title above personal principles – an issue that will remain with you.

Bottom line (an apt metaphor): your magazine comes first, then you. And that takes some getting used to. Not only in terms of being observed, but also in how you take responsibility for certain decisions. Tough call.

Get wired: news and mail

Editors should set an example in using Internet-based tools. You need to be the best informed and most organised of all your staff. Here's how.

Monitor hot topics

Use Google Alerts to send you an email advisory, with a clickable link, every time your selected phrase appears on the internet.

Getting tipped off when your own name appears should be top of your list. But you can also do it with key words on a big story – for example "media tribunal".

It's dead easy to set up, or cancel, the alerts. Visit www.google.com/alerts – remember to put quote marks around the words you want to track.

Use multiple home pages

You can load several home pages simultaneously and *on the same screen* when you switch on your computer. Say you want to include: www.mg.co.za, www.sabcnews.com, www.news24.com and www.iol.co.za.

How?

Internet Explorer (not an old version): click on Tools, then Internet Options. In the box headed "Home Page", type in the four internet addresses above, each on a different line. Click OK.

Firefox: load the pages you want, go to Tools, select Options, and then click on the "Use Current Pages" button.

To inspect all your pages while they are all loaded, just click the tabs for each one. ("Tabs"? – if they're new to you, ask someone immediately).

Use RSS feeds

This internet service is an acronym for Really Simple Syndication. It brings you updated headlines on whatever sites you want to keep track of – without you having to surf there every time. You click on the headline if you want to read the whole story. (Right-click will open it in another page, or tab).

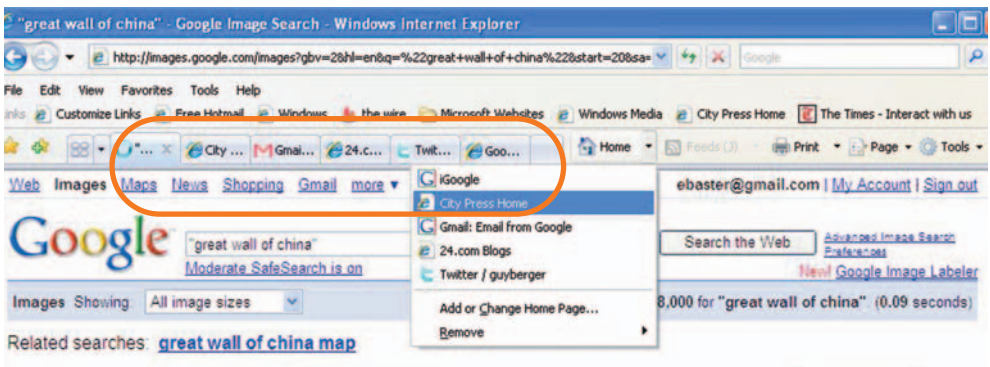
Any site will advise you if it offers RSS by showing a little orange icon on the pages, and sometimes in the internet address line at the top of your browser.

You can choose from three ways to sign up to RSS feeds:

a. Via your web browser (for example Explorer, Firefox).
b. Via your email.
c. Via a dedicated RSS reader (for example Google reader).

Which is best? Probably Firefox web browser, but some companies don't let you install this (free) programme. Via email might be the next most convenient. If you are a news junky, then use a dedicated reader.

Here's the "how-to" for all three options:



Multiple home pages on tabs in Internet Explorer.

RSS in your web browser:

Explorer: click the RSS icon; then click the yellow star on your toolbar; save. To see what's updated, click the yellow star again, click on "Feeds". To delete any feed, put your cursor on unwanted feed, and use right-button for delete command.

Firefox: click the RSS icon; click Cntrl D to save – and then scroll within the save box so that you can locate your bookmark toolbar, which you click on. Your RSS will then show up subsequently on your toolbar. Whenever you mouse over an RSS feed there, it will elegantly show you the headlines in a pop-up box below.

Reading RSS via Outlook email:

If you have a recent version of Explorer you have the option, when you save RSS feeds in it, of also having them show up in your Outlook Express.

Or, when you click on an RSS icon while surfing, you can copy its Internet address – thereafter, go to Outlook Express, and find the RSS Feeds button in your Mail Folders. Right-click there and you can add in your new feed: paste in the address you just copied.

Or: When you find a desirable RSS feed, click the icon, and copy its web address. Go to www.rssfwd.com, and paste in the address. You supply your email address, and each time the site updates, you get notified by an email message. This can keep you alert to a particular critical feed than would using a RSS reading system with a wide range of sources. Like most people, you probably check email more frequently than RSS.

Dedicated RSS readers:

There are many web pages out there that let you keep a list of RSS feeds and see what's changing. With them, you are storing your favourite RSSs on the Internet, rather than on your computer.

Try out www.google.com/reader and create a personalised reader. Each time you visit that page, you get you a menu on the left with a list of your subscribed feeds. The rest of the screen shows the latest headlines per feed.

Use Outlook calendar

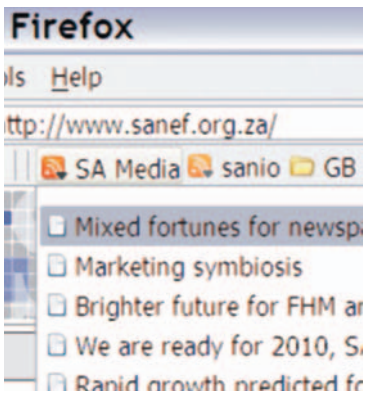
This facility enables you to schedule and be reminded about meetings in a way that maximises your organisational effectiveness.

Play around a bit, and you'll pick it up really fast. On your top menu bar, click on Go, and follow the logic.

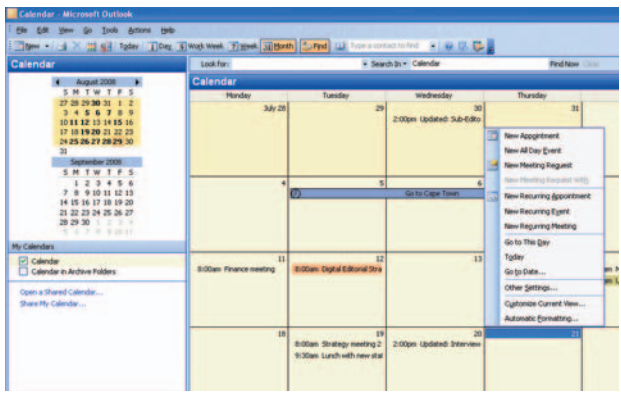
Stay ahead – know the jargon

Twitter. Delicious. Digg. Dooced. RSS. Mashup. Microblogging ...

You can find out the meanings at: http://www.converstations.com/blogging_glossary.html *– Guy Berger*



RSS feeds in Firefox.



For meeting reminders, use the Outlook calendar.

PRESENTATION SKILLS

Putting on a good show

Sometimes you just can't avoid Powerpoint, like it or not. It can be a power tool for presenting persuasive, memorable and well-structured information. It can also be a flop.

Your starting point is to internalise that it's a show, not a speech to be read word for word. Think "duet" – a joint act between you and what's projected.

All else flows from this, including some basic errors – so take note of the following ways in which a Powerpoint presentation can be absolutely corrupted.

> "It's a show, not a speech to be read word for word. Think 'duet'."

Five ways to fluff a presentation

1. Overload it: too much text on each screen, too many screens that complicate your message.
2. Spend more time looking at the projection than at your audience.
3. Have zero imagery or, conversely, a zillion special effects and/or an overly busy background.
4. Read verbatim what's on screen, or talk out of sync with it.
5. Forget to introduce your content and fail to sum up at the end.

Tip: have a hard copy printout with you to guide your progress, or as a crutch if the tech lets you down.

– Guy Berger

HOW ABOUT

Alternative methods

Paper handout – Summary of most important information from your presentation, which can be given out before (if you want audience to follow it on the paper) or afterwards as a reminder. Keep it short: one or two pages at most.

White board – Write up your key points as you go along, or do diagrams to explain complex processes.

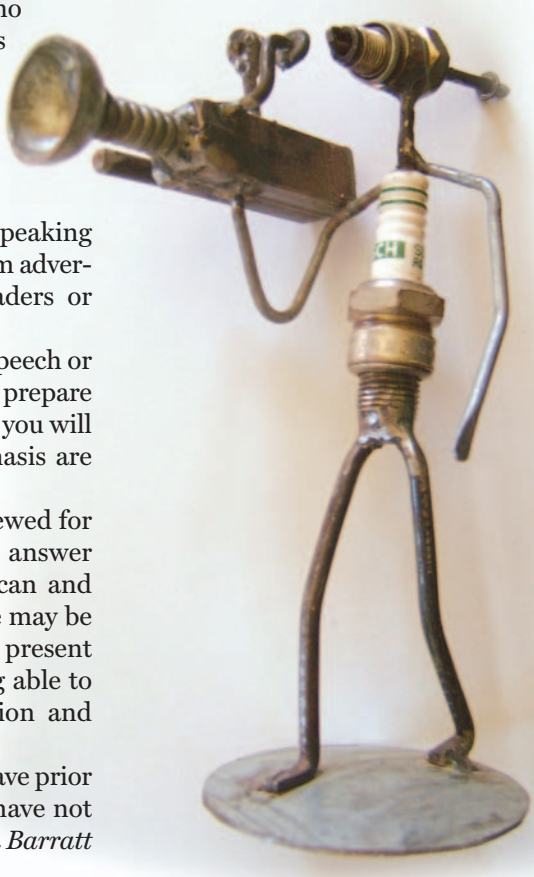
Flip chart – Record (in large text) key points during your presentation, or have the pages already written and reveal them when needed.

Slide show – Give entertaining visual accompaniment or examples, using photos or graphics.

Video – To demonstrate, with actual footage or role-plays, what you are speaking about.

GOING ON TV AND RADIO

How do you really look or sound?



An editor who says "umm" or mumbles repeatedly on radio, and one who continually ruffles their hair or looks like a frightened rabbit or unfeeling robot on television, does not come across well to the audience.

Yet he or she is presumably not aware of creating these distractions.

Editors are required to do public speaking frequently, to a variety of audiences from advertisers to politicians to groups of readers or schoolchildren.

When you are simply delivering a speech or presentation, you have to make time to prepare what you will say and think about how you will deliver it – what your points of emphasis are and how you will put yourself across.

However, when editors are interviewed for live broadcast, they usually have to answer questions off the cuff. Even so, you can and should prepare for possibilities. There may be an audience of millions, so you have to present yourself and your medium well. Being able to do this requires some self-examination and perhaps training.

Do not presume that because you have prior experience you cannot improve ... or have not developed odd habits! *– Elizabeth Barratt*

TIPS

How to improve your image

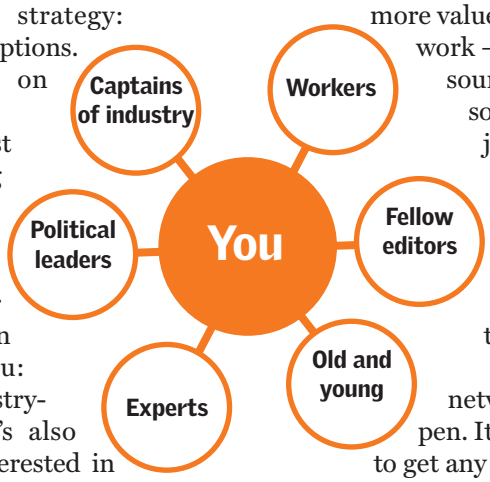
1. **Know your voice** – do audio recordings of yourself, with someone to ask you questions, and then listen to how you sound. Look for your faults and pay attention to correcting them so that you can speak clearly and with the correct emphasis needed. Monitor your breathing – it is the key to success.
2. **Check what you look like** – do video recordings of yourself being interviewed, and take note of how you sit, what movements you make, and whether you use your hands and facial expressions effectively to communicate what you are trying to say. Look for any distracting physical movements: do you purse your lips continually when others are speaking, fiddle with your hands or smile inappropriately?
3. **Prepare briefly beforehand** – think about who the audience is and what questions you are likely to be asked. Be clear on what main point or points you want to put across, and that you may be able to fit in to the questions..
4. **Get training** – a number of companies do two or three-day group courses on presentation skills. This is the most effective way to learn as you are critiqued in a small, safe group as well as assessing how others come across. Make sure the course includes video and audio.

The editor as hub

It's long after the awards have been given out, but the party continues. There's nothing that journalists seem to like more than hanging out with each other. Most editors, no matter how individualistic, also find it comfortable being in each other's company.

Sometimes you can call in such connections – for solidarity or simple advice. Facing an audience backlash over a controversial columnist? Ask a few peers to comment on your strategy: you'll get a range of options. They're not rivals on every single issue.

You build up trust through networking with fellow editors. They're interested in what you do. Don't forget also that your decisions are often not just about you: they can have industry-wide ripples. That's also why you will be interested in your peers.



Of course editors also network outside of media circles. It's a major part of the job.

What this means

Effective networking positions you as a hub. Some links to you are fragile and infrequent, others are forceful, even fixed. Some connections are interactive, others more unidirectional.

Working these is about building "social capital". Basically, that means a cluster of more or less regular connections can generate value for all participants as a function of what everyone puts into the system. Think optimum "social capital" as: "Would we be prepared to lend money to each other?" That's the apex of trust and reciprocity.

Adding value

The theory is that it's easiest to bond with people in a similar boat to yourself – like fellow editors (especially within your particular medium). It becomes a little more challenging to bridge to folk who are outside the media – for example captains of industry, political leaders. Taking up even more effort is when you build linkages with very different people – workers, foreigners, scientists, different demographics (for example the elderly, even toddlers!)

Here's the trick: the wider you go, the more value you add to your network – and don't only think sources. Think solidarity, sounding boards, even job security. The more diverse your network, the greater the riches. It's about tapping diverse intellectual, emotional and cultural resources.

Like friendship, a network doesn't just happen. It takes input if you are to get any output. It also means recognising, consciously, the range of connections and their strengths, and the extent to which you have the potential to be central to significant information flows and relationship-building.

Circulating

Take a leaf from the politicians' books: systematically work a social function. Fortunately, you don't have to kiss people or smarm everyone present. Just circulate. But if you are going to look around the room while somebody is trying to talk to you, your lack of networking prowess will show. Just tell the person after a few minutes that you also want to speak to others and move on politely.

Being an editor doesn't mean a licence to be arrogant. It'll just get in the way of your networking success.

And, by the way, if you confirm an RSVP, honour it. Don't damage your social capacity by not pitching up.

– Guy Berger

OUR EXPERIENCE

Benefit from being in a body

Femida Mehtar
Executive director, South African National Editors' Forum (Sanef)

There are many benefits that editors can reap from joining the South African National Editors' Forum (Sanef) but ultimately it is how you use those benefits.

There is no better place for editors and academic professionals to continuously sit down to debate – and act on – challenges, good or bad, facing the media.

Being part of this constructive organisation allows members a wonderful opportunity to participate in discussions that will ultimately help you to better explain what is taking place in South Africa and the rest of the world to your audience.

The structures within Sanef are conceived to ensure each sector, be it education, training, diversity, ethics or media freedom, can be focused on so that their areas of concern in this industry are addressed.

Voluntary participation in Sanef has exposed the talents of many media and academic professionals to each other, allowing them to improve working relations through understanding and acknowledging each other.

The constant contributions of those members who are active inside and outside the subcommittees, the council and the management committee, besides being intrinsically satisfying, have also held other rewards: from increasing contacts databases to being recognised as media leaders in electronic and print interviews, or even occasionally in awards.

Sanef mainly functions as a forum, but where there is consensus a strong stand can be taken.

The electronic and print media industry benefits when Sanef members work together to put out public statements or make submissions to Parliament. For instance, the Film and Publications Amendment Bill has for the past two years been discussed at meetings, events and in Parliament as a result of Sanef members, among others, constantly explaining the effect this piece of legislation could have on media if certain clauses are accepted. In this way Sanef has helped keep a serious threat to media freedom at bay.

At work in the Sanef office.

Sanef's proactive role in supporting journalists can be rapidly effective: journalists arrested without charges are often quickly released soon after Sanef alerts the media – thus alerting the public. Concerns about media self-regulation have been discussed widely within the forum, enriching coverage in the media edited by Sanef members and keeping government clear about where editors stand.

A core principle of the forum is stated in the message to the public that "media freedom is your freedom".

Of course, media freedom also underpins every editor's freedom. If you play an active role in Sanef, it will ultimately assist society in understanding the media better.

STRESS-BUSTING

How to reduce the heat

Pressure that delivers thrill and adrenalin is not a problem, except when you don't have time to make social talk with colleagues, or even to pee.

But stress can also make you unhappy – and you can be an infectious carrier of debilitating tension. Perhaps you're an involuntary addict who can't face cold turkey, but it is possible to manage the forms and functions of your stress.

QUIZ

Top work stressors

Tick the two below which damage your sense of well-being. Related sections that follow will help you to tackle them.

- ○ Meetings taking up too much time.
- ○ Meeting deadlines.
- ○ Struggling with insufficient budgets.
- ○ Dealing with personnel conflicts.
- ○ Evaluating staff performance.
- ○ Not meeting expectations.
- ○ Interruptions.
- ○ Picking up excessive criticism.
- ○ Making tough decisions that affect employees.
- ○ Complying with regulations and policies.

– Guy Berger

(drawn in part from WH Gmelch, Beyond Stress to Effective Management. John Wiley and Sons, 1982; Robyn Wilkinson, Avis Companion magazine.)

Stressed? Or just deserts?

No need to feel overwhelmed by stress. Yes, it is crazy-busy in the media kitchen, but no one forced you to be head chef. You can cope with both the symptoms and causes via the following process:

1 Pinpoint where or how stress manifests

for example back tension, headaches, irritability, bad health, fatigue, nerves, temper, isolation.

2 Analyse what's causing it

For example you feel utterly overloaded, there's a constant barrage of interruptions, your plans are too often frustrated. There are likely to be a number of issues, so analyse the most central ones. It can help if

Finding solutions

Some causes of stress may be related to who you are – like your workaholism. Others may be issues way outside your control.

Naturally, solutions will differ accordingly. Among your immediate responses might be a strategy to:

- **Introduce interim relief** (for example taking some temporary time out).
- **Adapt and find a work-around**, or a postponement of some tasks, when the cause of stress is simply outside your influence.
- In the medium term, your challenge is to **make deeper changes** to the actual cause(s) of the stress.
- **Long-term success** in addressing stress requires substantial alterations in the various processes and habits that are part of your life. In turn these need to be institutionalised and become regular behaviours, to avoid returning to old patterns.

you separate them into categories:

Organisational – culprits could include ambiguity in your job definition or an unfair workload.

Environmental – problems around office space, furnishings or technology.

Interpersonal – can you blame stress on a mistrustful, demoralised newsroom culture or too-frequent blow-ups between individuals?

Yourself – factors here may range from you making unrealistic estimates of time or an inability to say no, to a fear of conflict.

External – things like pressures from family, friends, politicians, audiences, bosses and/or sources, or a full calendar of must-attend public engagements.

3 Devise several solutions

For instance: your stress is largely because you can't get your work done due to interruptions, but at the same time you don't want to be inaccessible. One solution is to set up specific times for an open door, and close it otherwise. Even better: explain to colleagues what's eating you, and let them suggest solutions – perhaps even via a formal brainstorm session. In that way, you can help spread stress relief. Be creative and look at more than one option.

4 Try one of your solutions

Pull out your diary or digi-calendar to set out the times for implementation and review.

Avoidance

Some actions you take can help alleviate and avoid stress before it even arises:

- **Preventative action** – for example build up your general wellness through activities outside the workplace. Get enough sleep.
- **Contingency action** – for example have a clear plan for the occasions (often predictable) when stress is unavoidable.

Stress emergency

- Change your environment – go to another office or preferably outdoors.
- Breathe deeply – and stretch your arms skywards at the same time.
- Roll your shoulders.
- Relax and let your mind clear.

Mind, body and soul

- Losing yourself in something else – a book, a game, a movie – gives your mind a chance to recuperate so that you can make a comeback.
- Exercise – do it, even if it's only climbing the stairs instead of taking lifts.
- Keep an eye on your bigger picture – put work problems in proportion to loved ones like family and friends.
- Getting outdoors and into nature can also give you semi-spiritual strength to handle stress.

Take control – and talk

Editorships are not for sissies. Whether you like it or not, you will have to deal with your feelings about dealing with conflict.

Just as when you were a department head, you will have staff and colleagues who irritate you for a variety of reasons. Sometimes conflicts escalate from a difference of opinion to a personal battle.

Is it a work matter, or a matter of irreconcilable personalities and wills? Either way, you can be sure your staff know about it – and are talking about it. It affects the work environment negatively. Is there any chance it will just go away? Not much.

Most important: try to never react in the heat of the moment, especially in front of other staff. Take a breath and retire to think rationally about the problem.

You need to decide when to be proactive, removing the emotions which will have become attached to the conflict.

Give yourself a stimulating break

Lizeka Mda

Deputy Editor of *City Press*

When I first applied for the Nieman Fellowship, in 2002, it was during my fourth year as an executive editor at *The Star*. I had been working as a journalist for 15 years, and felt there were few challenges left.

I was seriously thinking about leaving the profession and pursuing a dream to run a bed-and-breakfast at the Wild Coast, while writing novels.

Someone suggested I try the fellowship, as it would afford me time out from the everyday grind of producing the paper while I seriously considered my next step. He thought the sabbatical would recharge my batteries, so to speak, and I would discover that I did not want to leave journalism.

He was right. But I did not get the fellowship that year, as I was beaten by Sue Valentine of Health e-News. I was second-time lucky in 2003. However, by then I had accepted a position of deputy managing editor at *Sunday Times*. This was a complication that nearly spoilt my time away, but that's another story.

The origins of a sabbatical can be found in the Old Testament where every seventh year, Hebrews would let their fields lie fallow in order to give the land – and people – rest. This was deemed to be good for productivity all round.

Academics have long enjoyed the benefits of a sabbatical, but other industries have been slow to follow suit.

The chief executive of media group Naspers, Koos Bekker, took a year's unpaid sabbatical from April 2007. He said he planned to use the time to investigate new media markets in the US, South Korea and Japan, but also "to read and relax".

Sadly, few of us can afford to take a whole year off, unpaid. Which is why the Nieman Fellowship is such a prize. An application has to be endorsed by the employer, who then commits to keeping the applicant's job the whole year s/he is at Harvard. Nieman fellows also still earn a portion of their salary while they are away, but some employers are more generous than others.

Then take control.

You can go out and have coffee with the person, or you can set up a formal meeting. Either way, assess the situation carefully beforehand. Have an agenda in your head or on paper, and make sure you have ideas of some processes and goals that will allow you to work together constructively again.

It is time to talk. Discuss the issues and do not get personal. Listen. Give your perspective on the problem, and ask the other person for theirs. Although the person might need to let off steam and bring up past issues, get this over with and move to specifics and concrete things.

Keep the talk around work issues: how to get jobs done effectively and productively. Set a time limit for the meeting and keep to it. Decide on common goals and a practical plan for the future. Schedule a follow-up meeting, and keep to it. *– Elizabeth Barratt*

SABBATICALS

Cartoon from the back of Mda's Nieman t-shirt.

However, as there can only be one South African Nieman Fellow each year (there was an exception one year), not everyone who could benefit from the sabbatical gets it. And that is a pity for the industry, because for its own regeneration, renewal and rejuvenation, it needs to be making more sabbaticals available, even if they are not the Nieman. Even if they don't commit the recipients to the journalism field.

When the US computer company, Cisco Systems, created a pilot sabbatical programme in 2002, they were surprised that 300 people applied. Employees got only a third of their pay in return for volunteering in the non-profit sector. So successful has the programme been that it is a permanent programme in Cisco's benefits package.

And half of Fortune magazine's "100 Best Companies to Work for in America" offer paid sabbatical programmes.

So what did the Nieman Fellowship do for me? It helped me rediscover the desire to learn. I learnt a new language – KiSwahili. I also learnt how to teach, as I taught IsiXhosa to a class that included a Harvard professor!

Not only did my new skills boost my confidence, they became part of a package that my employers have also benefited from.

Moving on after editorship

By John Dludlu

Former *Sowetan* editor (2002 to 2004)

Career opportunities for retired editors include:

- Teaching.
- Public affairs – not necessarily PR, the proverbial "dark side" journalists often talk about.
- Independent board direction – editors have quite a lot of value to add to South African boards.
- Writing – for those who leave journalism with some money, there's a shortage of scholarly and autobiographical books by editors about the job and the corner office or, as we called it in my day, "mahogany row", here and abroad. We need our own "New ideas from dead editors". The fact that journalism is essentially a self-selecting trade is overstated; today's world shows a desperate need for intelligent manuals on ascending to, and staying in, the high office.
- Organised business.
- Consulting – just don't teach them via Powerpoint presentations; ask them to just have honest conversations with their audiences as Jack Welch would have wanted.
- Publishing.

I guess it's like being a politician: you have to learn to deal with a loss of real/imagined power and sense of independence, especially if the job had, as often sadly happens, turned you into an unapproachable, haughty egomaniac.

Ask me: I'll tell you that it's not easy to live with the phrase "former editor" preceding your name before you turn 40. But you must quickly learn to bask in its glory!

An editorship is an extremely powerful institution even in today's environment, where most editors have unfortunately also been turned into businessmen.

However, all great editors I know about also turned out to be humble and genuine people – *The Telegraph*'s Bill Deedes, *The Guardian*'s Prof Will Hutton, *Golden City Post*'s Percy Qoboza, and one of my predecessors and a fine humanist, *Sowetan*'s Aggrey Klaaste, come to mind. These are people who are less likely to confuse business associates ("sources" as we call them in the trade) with friends. In fact, great editors have the rare ability to achieve both without compromising each other's positions.

> "It relies on the strength and quality of human relationships built earlier on in life."

"Moving on from the corner office" relies on the strength and quality of human relationships built earlier on in life – it's all really about the clean sense of "it's who, not what, you know that matters".

Relationships with old colleagues continue to be characterised by mutual respect, integrity and honesty – which also happen to be the lessons one has learned.

Important skills that retirees should never ditch are: a heightened sense of curiosity; an inquisitive mind; a passionate hatred of jargon and other gobbledygook; and, of course, a love of writing ... for those fortunate enough to master this by the time they leave the corner office.

Overview: taking responsibility for staff

Under your people management responsibility, at least 12 areas need to be addressed – some with standard operating procedures and policies:

- Contracts
- Job descriptions
- Recruitment and selection
- Induction
- Training
- Communication
- Performance appraisal and career development
- Remuneration
- Workplace policies (on HIV-Aids, sexual harassment, safety etc)
- Discipline, grievance and appeals
- Staff development & transformation
- Records

Retention

It's now well known that most employees leave for a different company not because of money, but due to dissatisfaction with:

- Role, expectations and job design
- Development and growth
- Not being recognised for contributions made
- Leadership and culture

Does the person fit the job?

Recruitment

A "mis-hire" is a waste of everyone's time, not to mention money. Avoid making a mistake you're stuck with by:

- Being clear about the job requirements.
- Advertising appropriately and headhunting suitable applicants.
- Having a strong interviewing (and, where possible, testing) process.

TIP

Job descriptions

Job descriptions should cover the purposes of the post, the line of accountability of the post-holder, his or her authority (including financial authority), where the job fits into the management organisation, and its key tasks.

Refresh what their job description covers in periodic discussions with employees, getting them to sign off any records of the meeting.

HINT

Merit payments

Merit payments are often a percentage increase on basic pay. However, if you are working from a discretionary budget, this will absorb it over time, leaving you with nothing. So another option, if your company accepts this method, is to treat such payments as one-off bonus awards.

If you have a performance management system, annual increases will be made according to merit.

Power-interviews of applicants

- Enlist different stakeholders into the interview team.
- Prepare by perusing documentation, so you don't waste time asking for basic information.
- Focus on how the applicant would do in the job, and don't get sidetracked.
- Ask for examples of how the person responded when a particular kind of challenge happened previously.
- Paint a hypothetical scenario to which the applicant has to respond.
- Try to find out what makes the person passionate and let them express it.
- Set up a role-play or practical exercise.
- Magic question: "How will it make a difference to our audience if we hire you?"

– Guy Berger

(drawn in part from Readership Institute's: How to Hire "Reader-Oriented" People)

TIP

Induction

There should be a standard induction programme for new employees that includes a comprehensive introduction to the organisation, its culture, systems and documentation (for example vision-mission-values, editorial policies, style guide, detailed conditions of service such as around sick leave). There is some stuff you should ensure happens, and other that HR will deal with – find out.

Include a tour of the premises and meeting key people in all editorial departments and at appropriate levels.

- A checklist will help to ensure all the relevant aspects are "ticked off". See "Checklist for recruits " on page 46

RECRUITMENT

Systematic steps for staff selection

Recruitment is likely to go through several stages, working with your human resources department which hopefully will do much of the admin.

1 You may need permission from management to fill a post, including approval of the job title, grading and salary.

2 Depending on your size of operation, it's worth setting up a small committee to help finalise the job description and candidate specifications, draw up the advert (use previous adverts as a guide) and decide on a search strategy. You may be required to draw up adverts in certain formats, such as "knowledge, skills, attributes" or "responsibilities and requirements".

3 Get the advert published – decide if internally only, or also externally, including on the web. Use your own contacts to spread the word too, especially if it is a senior post. You may decide to head-hunt specific potential applicants and ask them to apply.

4 Receive applications by the deadline stated in the advert.

5 Shortlist applications (with your committee if it exists).

6 Arrange for tests and interviews – and strategise the tests and questions in advance with the committee/panel, including HR.

7 Do tests and interviews – and don't be scared to give a test to even fairly senior people.

8 Do reference checks – a step often skipped, but essential.

9 Review results and decide on first and second choices.

10 Do any other checks or tests or assessments required by your company.

11 Offer the job – on the phone or face to face. Negotiate if necessary, finalise the job offer – including starting date – and get it signed.

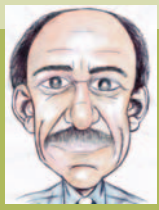
12 Decide on what is needed for induction or early training with the candidate, and who will do it.

13 Inform your staff early, particularly if it is a senior post, but only once the person has definitely resigned from their previous job.

– Elizabeth Barratt

SELECTING JOURNALISTS

Two vital factors to look for



By Brian Dyke
Psychologist and creator of the "Newshound" reporter assessment programme, former reporter

The work of a journalist spans probably one of the widest ranges of professional competencies.

Since research started into behaviour associated with successful journalism, two broad factors seem to account for consistently good work:

- The ability to **think logically**: in the context of journalism, the ability to manage information that requires "if, then" thinking. This is a cognitive ability.
- The ability to exercise discretion and **good judgement**. This means being able to manipulate the available information and an appreciation of how that information is likely to be interpreted. This is more about how people choose to conduct themselves.

An effective hiring approach should invite candidates to demonstrate the ability to apply this "what if ..." thinking, unrelated though it may seem to be to writing or presenting abilities. This is because research suggests editors can safely rely on deductive reasoning tasks to establish whether applicants have the required levels of cognitive ability.

Secondly, "good stories" are not always immediately obvious and tend to emerge from an aptitude to "make sense" of events. Since every story has a moral value (good and bad being recurring themes), reliable and valid assessment approaches should also give candidate journalists the opportunity to exercise judgement and discretion in creating themes or moral contexts into which stories are placed.

Research suggests that assessment approaches which do not include both deductive-thinking tasks and opportunities to show judgement and discretion, are likely to favour candidates who present eruditely, with confidence and so on, but without the requisite skills for good journalism.

It's not just about skills

Poor selection decisions often happen when people are excluded because they are unable to demonstrate specific work-related skills. While the ability to show some mastery of journalism-related skills – grammar, for example – may seem appropriate in selecting journalists, existing skills levels should not be the sole reason for exclusion or inclusion.

We may not be able to increase talent and ability significantly – one is either musically talented or not – but in the course of career development good journalists can acquire many additional work-related skills. Why else do we offer writing and editing courses to mid-career journalists?

Research suggests that those editors who give applicants a platform to show analytical thinking abilities and discuss the consequences of what they say and write, are more likely to have newsrooms filled with people able to uphold the standards of world-class journalism.

HANDY HINT

Check for essentials

If you want to select good journalists make sure the assessment or interview specifically includes a chance for candidates to display:

deductive reasoning
plus
judgement and discretion

CHECKLIST FOR RECRUITS

Settling a new journo

It is not unheard of for new staffers not to eat or drink anything, or even go to the toilet, on their first day. It can be as intimidating as starting school.

As tough editorial people, we may laugh about this and say that it is a test of character.

However, the reality is that the more effectively you can settle a new staffer, the quicker they will become productive.

As editor, you will usually delegate someone to do this, or ensure your heads of department are doing it.

Get someone to draw up a checklist suitable for your situation – but here is an idea of what any new staffer may need to know or get done in their first week of a new job in media.

Sample checklist

1 Location of toilets
2 Where to get tea/coffee/cold water
3 Canteen/nearest food place
4 Desk, chair and secure storage space
5 Computer
6 System logon
7 Email address
8 System training
9 Phone and extension number
10 Outside line and voicemail procedures
11 Internal phone list
12 Access card
13 Parking
14 Stationery
15 Daily newspapers and subscriptions
16 Code of conduct
17 HR person to do paperwork
18 Contract
19 Info on cellphone allowance and usage policy
20 Quick tour of building
21 Times of meetings and working hours
22 Deadline times
23 Tour of editorial and introductions to new colleagues
24 Physical, mail and website addresses
25 Circulation and readership info
26 Printer, photostat and fax machines
27 Procedure for expenses
28 Travel/freebies/gifts code and procedures
29 IT policies
30 Business card (include web address)
31 Medical aid details and procedures
32 Retirement/pension choices
33 Transport procedures
34 Disciplinary code
35 Go onto appropriate group email lists
36 Editorial and/or company mission, vision and values
37 Editorial style book
38 Editorial staff list, or organogram, with job titles.

– Elizabeth Barratt

TRY OUT THESE REWARDS

It is important to acknowledge contributions made by staff. Here are some ways to do this:

- Send a note to someone's family if they have been working overtime or travelling a lot.
- Interrelate to thank an employee, and keep other business out of the exchange.
- When you give praise, be specific – and explain how it helps the organisation and the people who work there.
- Have a personal coffee, or lunch, with a staffer to show appreciation.
- Send a letter to every team member at the end of a project.

(from Mannie Alho, SABC Intercom, August 10-24 2000)

> As a leader in an organisation you have to be able to convince those working for you that they are capable of achieving great things, more than they ever imagined. In turn, this means giving people responsibility and letting them get on with the job ... people perform better when they are trusted and encouraged rather than when they operate in a climate of fear or intimidation in which everything they do is doublechecked.
>
> – Greg Dyke, former director general of the BBC

MY EXPERIENCE

Creating a newsroom team

Willem Pretorius
Editor of *Sondag*

When starting a newspaper from scratch, the first two editorial positions an editor fills are those of news editor and chief sub-editor.

By these two positions a newspaper stands or falls. In both you need brave, robust, creative people with staying power and the skills to manage two difficult teams.

Then you need a fetcher – someone who can go out and find a story where most people would make a U-turn. Definitely not some new-generation journalist who thinks of a source as a telephone or the internet. We're talking hardnosed, hard-living, tough and brave; and able to write.

Then you need a strong triangle in a sports editor, an entertainment editor and an investigator. If these three positions are filled with creative people who thrive on stress, you are halfway there.

Only after those positions have been filled do you seek a political editor: a political animal, socialiser and smooth talker who loves mixing with those boring politicians that most people will try their best to avoid.

The same goes for the financial editor.

And then finally: the best newsroom is one that is filled with colourful, creative people who just love to tell a story – no matter what time of the day or night it is.

The imperfect perfect editor

Caroline Southey

Director, community banking strategy and reporting, Standard Bank, former editor of *Financial Mail*

Editors are like conductors of an orchestra. The brilliance of each individual player has to be nurtured and allowed to flourish while the discipline of the collective is imposed, so that what appears in print, or goes out on air, is a clever and pleasing orchestrated collection of excellence.

Editors hold the baton. They set the pace, they dictate where the emphasis should fall and they calibrate the inputs so that the output grabs the audience.

They cannot miss a beat. They must share their interpretation of the score with their staff.

Without this leadership the end result will be discordant. Put more mundanely, as a wise old man did for me once: "An editor is like a teabag. Your views will, over time, infuse the newsroom. There will be passionate engagement and disagreement, but journalists will know what you want."

> "An editor is like a teabag."

To achieve this, editors have to engage constantly with those who work for them.

The editor has to lead continuous and robust debate on current topics and issues. These debates must take place in a structured way (news conferences where diaries are debated and priorities set) but they can also take place in unstructured ways, such as engagements on the newsroom floor or in the canteen at lunchtime or at the bar after work.

And in one-on-one conversations.

In modern newsrooms this is difficult. Technology means that editors are constantly being bombarded: memos, letters, emails, text messages, missives from the 9th floor.

Gabriel Garcia Marques, who started life as a journalist before becoming a Nobel Prize-winning author, put it this way in an essay on "The Best Profession in the World": "Silence reigns: the editor who was a compassionate sage in times gone by barely has the energy or the time to keep up with the punishing pace imposed by technology."

In addition, editors have to cope with demands made by modern newspaper proprietors. They are expected to devote as much time to ad sales and profits as they do to editorial integrity and producing a product that sells.

The best, however, stick to what they were hired for in the first place: an ability and passion for making brilliant journalism.

Personal experience suggests it is better to:

1) Communicate by email as little as possible. There is no substitute for eye contact.
2) Prioritise time. If the MD is getting more airtime than your staff, give your diary a makeover.
3) Know that you will never have enough hours in a day to touch base with all your staff. Don't be overwhelmed. Be systematic and do what you can. And attend your news conferences.

All five editors I have worked for failed in at least one of these (as did I). But they were also brilliant in at least one. Possibly that's the most anyone can aim for.

COMMUNICATION FLOWS

Info flows enable a learning culture

Are your internal comms up to making your newsroom an efficient and ever-learning place to be?

Three aspects can be assessed:

- Downward flows
- Upward flows
- The quality of the communication

The Readership Institute in the US interviewed almost 5 500 employees at American newspapers. It found that downward communication in newsrooms was rated only 3 out of 5. For upward communication flows, the figure was even lower. Most critically, the ranking for the quality of the communications – as being conducive to learning – was under 2 out of 5. Clearly, there was lots of room for improvement. Assess your shop using the matrix below.

Downward Communication

How effectively information is communicated by higher-level positions to employees in lower levels (1 is Useless, 3 is Okay, 5 is Excellent):

	1	2	3	4	5
1. Timely (not delayed)					
2. Complete (not sketchy)					
3. Straight from the source (not through too many channels)					
4. Credible (not questionable)					
5. In-depth (not superficial)					
6. Through formal channels (not through the "grapevine")					
7. Anticipated and understood (not unexpected and surprising)					
8. Consistent and confirmatory (not changing and confusing)					
9. Easily processed (not information overload)					

Upward Communication

The effectiveness of information flow from bottom to top in the newsroom hierarchy:

	1	2	3	4	5
1. Forthright (not censored)					
2. Provided voluntarily (not provided only when demanded)					
3. Whatever needs to be said (not only what bosses want to hear)					
4. Positive suggestions (not negative complaints)					
5. Honest and complete (not filtered and distorted)					
6. How we can make things work (not "why things won't work")					
7. Accepted (not rejected)					
8. Understood (not misinterpreted)					
9. Acted on (not ignored)					

Communication for Learning

The extent to which there is communication about the "big picture," interdependencies and learning:

	1	2	3	4	5
1. Emphasises the big picture (does not emphasise micro-management)					
2. To promote discussion (not to communicate decisions)					
3. How do we learn from mistakes (not who do we blame for mistakes)					
4. Reflects a team perspective (does not reflect individual viewpoints)					
5. Focused on the organisation (not on units/ departments)					
6. Concerned with interdependencies (not concerned with isolated jobs or tasks)					

(with acknowledgement to the Readership Institute, US).

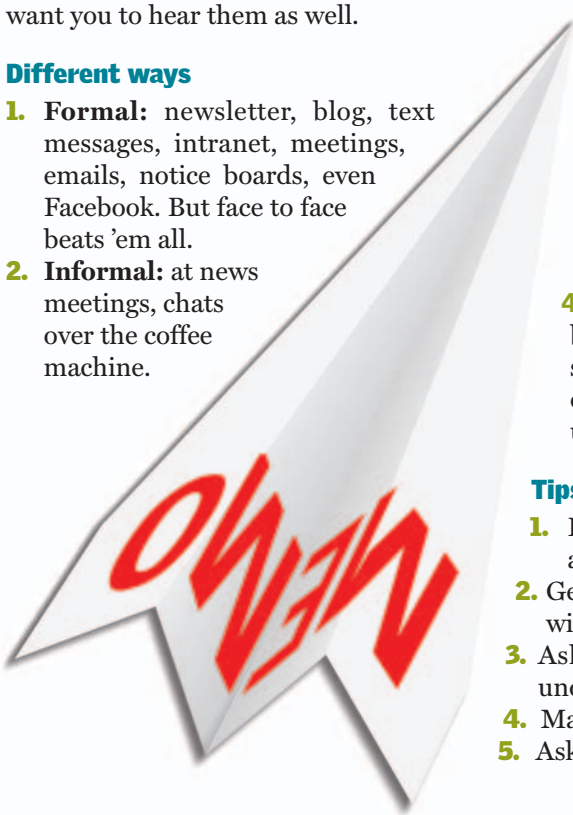
HANDY HINTS

Ways of communicating with staff

Staff will always complain that their boss, and the company, do not communicate with them enough. They want to hear more from you, and they want you to hear them as well.

Different ways

1. **Formal:** newsletter, blog, text messages, intranet, meetings, emails, notice boards, even Facebook. But face to face beats 'em all.
2. **Informal:** at news meetings, chats over the coffee machine.



Take every opportunity for one-to-one and group encounters.

The aims of communication

1. **Bi-directional** – open the door to conversation, feedback and ideas.
2. **Clarity of strategy** – understanding the path everyone should follow.
3. **Motivation** – knowing the relevance of wider information to the jobs they are doing.
4. **Creating a sense of control** – both that you are in charge and so staff can feel in charge of their own jobs on a day-to-day level by understanding the goals.

Tips

1. Be specific and concrete – not abstract and general.
2. Get to the point – don't waste time with long lectures.
3. Ask questions to see if people understand.
4. Make it simple, not complicated.
5. Ask for responses and ideas.

– Elizabeth Barratt

RETENTION STRATEGIES

Motivating your colleagues

Alan Dunn
Editor of *Daily News*

"Pay them more," editors tell managers in the unending battle to retain poachable staff.

"Manage them better," managers fire back.

As we squabble, more talent is lost. And our reflexive positions in the hoary argument lose sight of the truth that somewhere between the two lies the key to strengthening our news media and growing promising colleagues into tomorrow's industry backbone.

When a prospect is lost to a hefty pay increase, it is for a tangible reason. One's attempts to head off the departure feel hollow as one goes about it. The colleague is leaving for unarguable reasons, so shut up unless you can match them.

The trick for editors must surely be to prevent colleagues from casting about, to conjure ways to stop them before they start mailing that CV.

Management is partly right, though not as much as it believes: there is a lot to be done in making the workplaces we run engaging for those of our staff who are keepers.

My own disappointments have firmed the belief that there are no sure formulae, only styles in dealing with colleagues. Here are some thoughts:

Shut doors hinder one's hearing. Resist the temptation to cope better with that unrelenting workload by closing the office door. Remain accessible, interact at all levels and face the hard questions.

The first test of a communications organisation should be to communicate internally – which many fail to do. Involve your staff, and their brainpower and enthusiasm. Tell them what you can, let them know of important decisions – who you are endorsing in the next election, and so on – before they are published. It is, after all, as much their title as yours. Discuss issues, any issues.

Make the magic of journalism infectious by sharing your passion for it at every opportunity. Restore the fun of it. It is like no other profession; conveying that uniqueness must become your art. Support innovation and showcase it internally and externally.

> "Make the magic of journalism infectious by sharing your passion."

Be there to help and counsel during big newsbreaks, pumping in ideas and sharing the long hours these events demand. Take the dictate yourself, if need be. All hands on deck, and all that: two of them must be yours – it also sustains the magic for you.

Celebrate the triumphs with colleagues. Deal with the defeats, but do so privately when they involve individuals. This is the only time, really, that the editor's door should close.

Rewarding quality work

Should journalists work hard for (a) the aims of the company, (b) the ideals of journalism or (c) to get promoted or win merit increases? Should getting a salary at the end of the month be enough reward for good work? Answer: in the long term, a combination of these factors will motivate most journalists.

On top of these drivers, short-term rewards can provide added motivation. This is where competitions provide recognition for exceptional efforts – and for individual tasks exceptionally well done.

Winning work also provides standards of journalistic excellence that all can aspire to. And it benefits a newspaper, radio, TV station or website to have winners of prestigious competitions on board and be able to tell your audience about your crew.

Besides, the process of entering a competition gives the individual a chance to look at his or her work as a whole, and do a self-evaluation of what was mediocre, good or excellent ... a bit of soul-searching always helps.

When a journalist enters mediocre work for a competition, or enters a whole pile of work without being able to choose what is their best, it is clear that the person has no supra-personal or informed way of evaluating their own work, or cannot assess quality.

External competitions

On the other hand, preparing to enter a competition does take up time – and with hundreds of journalism competitions running each year in South Africa, on the continent and internationally, with wonderful financial and other rewards offered, it is right to question whether this is how your top journalists should be spending their time.

The best solution is for an editor to provide guidance: both on what competitions are worth entering, and whether particular work is really good enough to enter. This need not involve constant monitoring, but just passing remarks to journalists when they have done well: "Maybe you should keep a copy of that to enter in the Mondi Shanduka contest," or "That photographic series is as good as last year's CNN winner."

So if you are asked to sign a competition entry for work which is not exceptional, you need to give leadership: have an honest and helpful chat with the person.

Internal competitions

Having your own internal awards provides a few stepping stones. They are a chance to talk to staff about what is excellent work, and why it is excellent. They give journalists space to understand your standards and evaluate their own output. And, of course, they are a welcome opportunity to celebrate good work!

However, before you set up internal awards, remember the pitfalls:

- Someone has to do the admin of setting deadlines, putting out reminders, collating entries, getting the judges together, announcing results, displaying winning entries and making sure prizes reach the winners.
- The judging panel must be fair.
- A range of types of work, not just the text stories or TV camerawork, need to be rewarded.
- The awards must be done regularly – monthly, quarterly and/or annually.
- You need a clear set of rules and procedures.
- Prizes must be worthwhile, not insulting tokens.

Many internal editorial awards become negatives because they are started with great pomp and ceremony but fizzle out after a short time. This often happens when they are too frequent (weekly or monthly), no one has time to organise them, or the same people win repeatedly.

Finally, as an editor it helps you to know what the big prize-winning stories are: looking at the Pulitzer winners each year can give you story ideas!

– Elizabeth Barratt

AGGRIEVED STAFFERS

Reassurance through attention

Tyrone August
Editor of *Cape Times*

"Can I see you some time?" These are, quite often, the most chilling words to the ears of an editor. Not, as you might expect, "give me your wallet", even if uttered in a dark alley.

The sense of alarm and unease generated by an approach from an aggrieved staffer is not much different. The ominous phrase is often prompted by anger, frustration or resentment.

How best to deal with such a situation? There are, of course, no easy answers. It depends on the nature and scale of the issue behind the request.

That is a good place to start: make time to find out, sooner rather than later, what the grievance or complaint is about.

Not all problems are equally urgent, but staff do need to know there is a willingness to listen to them and that, wherever possible, a willingness to address the issue that concerns them.

The next step is to embark on an appropriate course of action: it initially entails taking up the issue with the staffer's department head, so protocol is observed (and egos aren't bruised).

A problem of a serious nature may require a joint follow-up discussion with the staffer and department head (this depends on the specifics – there is no one-size-fits-all approach).

Depending on the nature of the complaint, the editor may need to manage the rest of the process by speaking to all the parties involved and, where necessary, to other relevant line managers or managers.

If these attempts to resolve the matter are still unsuccessful, seek the advice of a third party (for instance, a representative from the human resources department).

This can be a time-consuming process, but an aggrieved staffer is not only unhappy and frustrated but also an unproductive member of your team. This is unhealthy and disruptive.

A serious matter obviously needs urgent attention. However, even when no immediate resolution is possible, always keep talking: the point is to reassure the complainant that he/she is a valued member of staff, and that you take his/her problems seriously.

Even when the outcome of your efforts is not entirely to the satisfaction of the staffer concerned, at least he/she will respect and appreciate your efforts to assist.

At times, there are problems that can't be resolved; but you can still make a concerted effort.

If the issue is still unresolved at the end of this process, suggest that the staffer embarks on the more formal procedure of lodging a grievance or calling for disciplinary action (depending on the nature of the problem).

However, until the less formal processes are exhausted, the best course of action is usually to talk, plan and act. Then talk some more.

So don't always look for the nearest exit the next time a staffer sidles up to you and asks you for a chat. It is when staff stop approaching you with their concerns that you should really be worried. Then they have given up on you, and no longer have any faith in your ability or willingness to assist them.

In brief

1. Listen.
2. Preferably take notes (even at the risk of being accused of being anal).
3. Suggest a clear course of action (for instance, a follow-up discussion with the other parties).
4. Seek advice from HR, if necessary.
5. Have follow-up discussions.

Managing tensions with trust

The Poynter Institute's **Gill Geisler** points to trust as a key aspect of leadership. She says it's based on showing:

- Your expertise (to achieve results)
- Your ethics (to act with integrity)
- Your empathy (and concern with individuals).

Establish trust and you are halfway to dealing with conflicts and difficult conversations.

Fixing friction

Geisler distinguishes several ways of responding to conflict:

Avoidance: tactically useful sometimes; not viable in the long term.

Control: depends on your power to break deadlock, often not the best resolution.

Compromise: use when the goal is not so important; often a reserve option and enabler in keeping relationships.

Collaboration: gets beyond expressed positions; often involves addressing issues of identity and relationships. On this basis, it then deals with underlying interests by exploring alternative options.

The general theory is: don't try to intervene at the level of attitudes or personality traits: focus on behaviours which are more easily changeable.

Difficult conversations

One reporter badly needs to ditch his sweaty shoes – the reek is revolting to everyone. Another journalist is demotivated, unproductive and full of excuses. A third seems to experience criticism as being selective and racially influenced. It's time for you as supervisor to confront the problems.

Rule 1: Don't avoid the difficult talk, unpleasant as it is. Very seldom do problems correct themselves on their own.

Rule 2: What happens before and after are as important as the conversation itself.

Have a strategy

Prepare for the conversation; also take minutes of the outcome.

Here's advice, some of it from US editor **Trisha O'Connor**, which she produced for the Poynter Institute:

Before the meeting:

- Is it your call, or should the conflicting parties involved be asked to seek resolution at peer level, or at lower reporting levels where these exist?
- If the problem is rightly on your desk, separate out the key points as far as you can see them. Write them down.
- Clarify your aim of the meeting: is the conversation mainly to exchange information and hear the person's side of the story, or to also go further and reinforce protocols or establish systems for addressing an issue?
- Ask yourself: what could happen that I don't expect?
- Think about what you want as optimum outcomes, and clarify the limits of what you'll settle for.

HANDY HINT

Questions to ask

Try these questions when exploring a difficult conversation:

- Can you say more about how you see things?
- What information might you have that I don't?
- How do you see it differently?
- What impact have my actions had on you?
- Can you expand on why you think it is my fault?
- Were you reacting to something I did?
- How are you feeling about all this?
- Say more about why this is important to you.

(adapted from Difficult Conversations, by Stone, D; Patten, B, and Heen, S. 2000. New York, Penguin.)

- Don't plan a difficult conversation for a Friday: it can leave a person to simmer dangerously over the weekend.
- Notify your superiors, and consult HR if need be, about the impending meeting.
- Rehearse with a colleague in a role-play scenario if it's really serious.

Different levels

Get your mind in gear: you will unavoidably be taking part in THREE simultaneous conversations:

1 **What gets said:** Probe and listen carefully to the answers (see sample questions below). Don't immediately assume the other person is the problem or is in the wrong.

2 **What gets felt but usually not said:** Understand these feelings, and elicit and acknowledge (without necessarily agreeing with) the other person's feelings. Raise yours as well, though without venting.

3 **Self-dialogue:** your internal voice as observer, assessing what the whole conversation means about you and your self-image: Be sure that your identity is grounded, without being inflexible or rigid.

Other advice is to set the tone of the discussion as a "learning conversation". Focus on what has contributed to the situation and what solutions can now be contributed by the two of you.

(adapted from Difficult Conversations, by Stone, D; Patten, B, and Heen, S. 2000. New York, Penguin.)

During the meeting

1. Remember that this is usually not (yet) a disciplinary hearing, nor even an occasion to give a formal warning. It is still at the investigation and counselling stage. If you succeed, things may not come to further measures.
2. Indicate to the person the reason for the conversation, and express the hope that the occasion will be a step towards going ahead.
3. Meet in a private place. Be hyper-aware of your body language and the specific words you use.
4. Set the tone by refreshing mutual understanding, interactively, about the common goals of the organisation and each of your roles in it.
5. Outline what particular behaviour is at issue and explain that it appears to be inhibiting the individual's standing or progress.
6. Get the person's reaction by asking: "What do you think about what I have said?"
7. Probe: "What do you think should have happened?", "How did this come about?" and finally "What do you think should happen from here?"
8. If the person raises other problems, or goes on to the attack (as a form of defence) and starts blaming others, indicate that these matters – even if interrelated – can be handled distinctively. Normally, the original focus of the meeting will need to be dealt with first, and in its own right, and you therefore may want to keep to this matter at this time.
9. Be helpful: offer suggestions and ask what you can do to assist.
10. Summarise at the end, and ask the person to provide a written plan for the next steps. These steps should be specific and, as much as possible, tangible, so that progress can be monitored.
11. Express confidence in a successful resolution.

Afterwards

1. Make notes for your files.
2. Maintain any optimism, goodwill and trust arising from the interaction.
3. Do what you said you would, and require the same from the individual concerned.
4. Praise progress, but deal swiftly with further or continued problems.

– Guy Berger
(with acknowledgement to Gill Geisler)

MANAGING HIV/AIDS

You need a workplace policy

In South African conditions, every newsroom should have a strategy for covering HIV/Aids in their media – for instance, how to deal with science, education, ethics, advocacy and story-telling.

But it's not a one-way street of how media coverage impacts on Aids. You also have to manage how the HI-virus can impact on your employees.

In 2004, the Media Institute of Southern Africa (Misa) surveyed 10 SADC countries and found that 80% of media institutions had neither an Aids policy in place nor editorial guidelines on reportage.

The research revealed that the major concerns of journalists in relation to revealing their HIV/Aids status included job security, employment benefits, unfair labour practices and possible discrimination.

High risk

Journalists are said by some to be high-risk individuals due to often being relatively young and mobile.

Having employees who are HIV-positive can lead to absenteeism, reduced productivity, staff loss and newsroom mourning. As a result, editors and managers are best served by having workplace policies and programmes.

Independent Newspapers, for instance, has an elaborate HIV and Aids programme that provides employees with education, pre- and post-test counselling, testing itself, multi-vitamin supply, provision of antibiotics, nutritional support and psycho-social support.

A formal policy can help reduce infections and assist the people who are afflicted. The objectives of such a policy should be to continuously ensure that employees are aware of risks, safe-sex

MANAGING HUMAN RESOURCES

It's a special relationship

They have an everyday role of looking after your staff – medical aid, pension, leave, salary queries and so on – but your most frequent interaction with your company's human resources staff is likely to be regarding recruitment and performance management procedures.

Your most intense interaction, however, will be around disciplinary and grievance procedures.

There is an oddity to this relationship that you need to be aware of: you rely on them to work for you, yet they do not report to you ...

The best way to manage this relationship, therefore, is to treat them as expert consultants – not just as a service department.

They should know everything about company policies and procedures affecting staff, and you can draw on this – and their other expertise – for advice and practical help whenever you need it.

Their role is to facilitate your staff management, not to create extra, unnecessary admin or make your editorial managers or secretaries do HR work.

And there are many ways in which that they are qualified to help. For example, when a job advertisement needs to

alternatives, and their rights and responsibilities.

Rights

As regards implementation, the policy should indicate respect for confidentiality and voluntary testing, and acknowledge that no one (including new job applicants) will be discriminated against if they make their status public.

It is important that a policy states that no employment contracts will be terminated on account of HIV or Aids alone, although affected staff should be encouraged to advise if there are performance implications. If the person is no longer able to work, and cannot be placed elsewhere in the company, it should be stated that appropriate boarding or retirement policies within the Labour Relations Act will apply.

A policy should further highlight the need to dispel misconceptions and stigma through workplace programmes.

A policy position will be needed in terms of infection contracted in the course of duties (for example blood transmission), and in terms of whether the institution will pay for anti-retrovirals in an emergency. There should also be guidelines included in emergency or first-aid systems that will reduce risks of transmission.

To monitor and implement a workplace HIV/Aids policy, it is advisable to create a sub-committee that is wider than just human resources personnel, with defined terms of reference and a set frequency of meetings and communications.

– Guy Berger

Going public?

A 2001 survey of HR managers at 11 South African media companies with a combined staff of almost 7 000 employees found only two employees had publicly disclosed their HIV-positive status.

Source: Jo Stein, 2001. HIV/AIDS and the South African Media Workplace policies and programmes. Centre for AIDS Development, Research and Evaluation. http://www.cadre.org.za/uploads/workplace_pol.pdf

be drawn up, a professionally managed HR department will be able to provide one or two previous adverts so you need not start from scratch. Or when you need information about sick leave or gender imbalances, they can do the analysis from their records and provide you with the results.

You need a good relationship with HR because they can be your best allies in times of staff trouble: they should be able to effectively support and guide you through any conciliation, mediation or disciplinary challenges. If a staffer has personal problems, you can decide whether/when to bring them in to help.

You can call on them to effectively train your managers in performance appraisal as well as provide wider employee relations training – formally or informally. And most companies insist that an HR person sits in on recruitment interviews, as well as doing much of the paperwork.

If you find that your HR department is not professional and effective, it is best that you take this up with company management – rather than ending up having to do their jobs as well as your own.

– Elizabeth Barratt

Ethics and culture

Mathatha Tsedu
Editor-in-chief of *City Press*

Ethics issues arise around people and around content, but the bigger of these is people.

In managing staff, both an atmosphere and a mechanism are needed to encourage ethical behaviour.

Challenges, in the main, arise from some level of compromise that might occur through relationships or inducements. So it is important to put the mechanism in place: the code of conduct must exist in some live way in the office as a guide for staff.

For example, a freebie policy is important because it lays down agreed parameters of how to deal with what is essentially a relationship issue between a journalist and their source or the general public. People may feel they want to give you, for instance, a pen. The journalist cannot refuse because of the need to be civil, but as editor you must remove the possibility of this civility creating a conflict of interest for the journalist.

Once you have a mechanism in place, you find you have removed 80% of the problems that previously arose. Make sure every staffer gets a copy of your code.

The code should include trips, which can be managed in a defined way: such as insisting that individuals are not invited but the invitation goes to the editor. The leadership then decides what is in the paper's best interests – who, if anyone, should go on the trip.

By and large, ethics and journalists are the same all over the world: you have to be truthful and to a large extent show respect for the dignity of the subjects you are dealing with. The implementation of this may be affected by the cultural upbringing of the journalist.

For example, where I grew up you would not call an older person just by their surname: there is a prefix to show respect. But if the in-house style is to call all people by their surnames, you have to adapt to that for consistency of style.

In the same way, I grew up in an area with great respect for the dead. If a car was carrying a coffin, you would stop walking and wait in silence for the car to pass. If someone died, there was a three-day mourning period for the whole community and you could not work. You could not even dig or use the soil, because you needed to allow time for that person to become part of the soil.

Those things would influence how I would write those stories, but all stories must still be guided by general ethics –

TIPS

What I have learnt:

DO get involved in your ethics mechanism. As a leader, give yourself time to look at some of the work; make the effort. If you find something glaring and troublesome, instead of dealing with the head of department call in the reporter. Sit down non-confrontationally and talk them through what is wrong, what went wrong and how it could have been avoided. Create access to staff, and access to you.

DON'T preach what you don't practise. If there is a freebie policy, you must be exemplary in handing in everything you receive.

DOES this mean if you do all these things, you will have a perfectly ethical environment and publication? That is the aim, but there will be slips. The key thing is when a slip occurs, recognise it: find out how it occurred and make sure it will not slip again. It's a permanent struggle. The battle for a completely ethical publication and editorial environment is an ongoing one.

the cultural difference is really just nuance.

When it comes to content, the main ethics challenges are around verification and the sufficient sourcing of stories.

There is a whole new set of journalistic practice around tabloidism that allows what is essentially one source – or rumour – that sounds great, to get into the paper. Enforcing the code, such as requiring triple sourcing and verification, becomes extra-important.

This issue came into play with Ranjeni Munasamy's "Ngcuka spy" story, when I was *Sunday Times* editor. What had been written or was going to be written did not meet the *Sunday Times*'s code of ethics: the story was not verifiable, information was coming from people who did not want to be named and on top of this, some had obvious self-interest. It didn't stand up to scrutiny under the mechanism; so there was essentially no story to publish.

I told Munasamy. She took it to *City Press*, and then-editor Vusi Mona published it. In the same edition, he ran a front-page editorial listing a host of questions the story had not answered. I called him that morning and told him he was a brave man – as the story was in the questions. He laughed, and I don't think he caught the cynicism in my voice because he repeated my words at the Hefer Commission as if I had congratulated him for publishing such a story.

When I came to *City Press*, there was no real code of ethics. To build one we cribbed from all sorts of codes, even that of the *Sunday Times*.

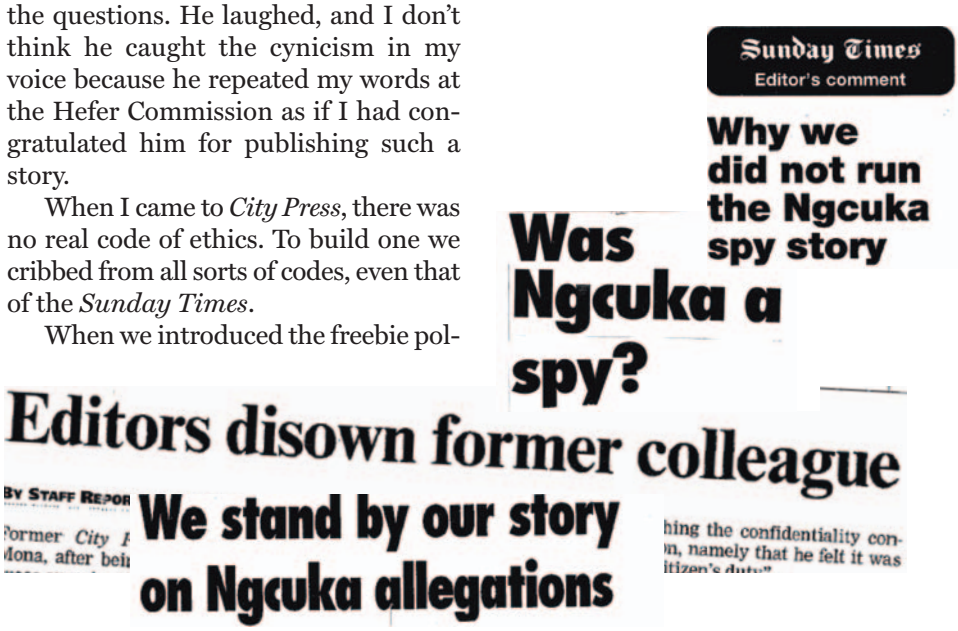
When we introduced the freebie policy there was resistance, especially from those whose clothes were walking billboards for others! On top of that we strictly implemented verification and accuracy tests, and put mechanisms in place to create a clearly defined environment of ethical behaviour.

As that process took root, the content of the paper changed, the attitudes of our audience to the paper changed, and sales began to grow.

Ethics can also guide an editor's choice of campaigns.

Journalism ethics codes are based on an inclination, an attempt, to do right through our work. At *City Press* I wanted to spread that wider. The Your SA campaign says there are too many wrong things that we as people do, that we don't have to do. If we have a different mindset, we can change how we relate to each other in our public spaces and that will improve the environment.

In a way, then, through this campaign we are trying to translate the general approach and ethics of what we do as journalists every day to the overall behaviour patterns of those who come into contact with us, to improve the country's environment and public spaces.


Sunday Times
Editor's comment
Why we did not run the Ngcuka spy story
Was Ngcuka a spy?
Editors disown former colleague
We stand by our story on Ngcuka allegations

Safety policy for journalists

Sahm Venter

Media liaison and researcher at the Nelson Mandela Foundation, journalist since 1981

On April 16 2008 a 23-year-old television cameraman, Fadal Shana, was killed in Gaza.

Doctors said he was shot by a missile fired from a defence force tank. The Israelis denied the allegation.

Shana's death, which came two years after he survived a similar incident, brought to eight the number of journalists killed in 2008 – and 686 from almost all continents since 1992.

His soundman, Wafa Abu Mizyed, had his hands injured. No details were given about the extent of his injuries and how they may impact on his future physical or psychological ability to work.

While international human rights and media organisations immediately and quite correctly called for an investigation into the circumstances of the tragedy, one wonders if the team was insured and how much they knew about their company's safety policy.

Unlike other risky careers, journalism generally comes without sufficient safety training, financial insurance, or, more importantly, an effective safety policy – particularly one which journalists themselves could participate in drawing up and monitoring.

In September 2000, Reuters, which employed Shana, had adopted, along with main rival AP Television and CNN, BBC and ITN, a safety policy. This followed the

ON THE GROUND

Policy needs to be more than a piece of paper

My research for an MA Degree at Rhodes University, completed in 2005, delved into the perceptions among journalists and managers at Reuters TV and APTV about their safety policy.

Just over half the 20 journalists interviewed four years after the creation of the "joint code of practice for journalists working in conflict areas" said they had never seen it.

While most at least had heard about its elements, only a quarter said this had been through their employers. Meanwhile, according to the two managers interviewed, one from each company, the policy had been distributed to all staff covering dangerous assignments.

The least-known aspects of the policy were that journalists on a dangerous assignment should be supervised by a more experienced colleague and that the companies encouraged psychological counselling.

Only two of the 20 journalists interviewed had been involved in creating the policy, but most were keen to be consulted about improving and monitoring the policy's implementation.

Three-quarters had been sent on safety courses, but only three were aware the policy made retraining mandatory.

A particularly interesting finding was how journalists operated to balance their safety with commercial pressure to get the story. This was to work with their competition in the field rather than scooping them, and also to tell lies to their editors about what they were doing. This points to gaps in the policy, but there was no process of monitoring or review.

The study recommended that the broadest range of stakeholders should be involved in drawing up and monitoring this kind of journalism policy.

HOW I SEE IT

killing of two journalists in an ambush in Sierra Leone.

The "joint code of practice for journalists working in conflict areas" included safety training and retraining for journalists, a clause allowing them to refuse dangerous assignments, and the roll-out of safety equipment and psychological counselling.

The policy was good news for journalists and their bosses. It was particularly good news for those who believed in the necessity of sound policies for the effective operation of any entity.

It was also a policy that could easily translate into the operation of virtually any news organisation in the world. In fact it has since been adopted by more than 100 media groups, press freedom bodies and journalists' associations.

The guidelines in the "joint code" took into account the nature of the work, its psychological impact, the pressures many journalists face having to keep up with

Displays at The Newseum, Washington DC, salute fallen journalists and highlight the need to implement safety policies.

the competition, and even the protection of freelancers who are often hired on the spot as fixers, drivers and translators.

In South Africa, our high levels of crime and rage, and the consequent danger inherent in virtually every story our journalists must cover, should be enough motivation for media companies to take a long, hard look at safety issues. Recent events such as service delivery protests and violence around xenophobia make the need even more obvious.

In addition, with the advent of new 24-hour news channels comes the inevitable increased pressure on South African companies to assign journalists to cover the news continent-wide and in fiercer competition.

The time is ripe for editors to assess what safety policy, if any, they have for their staff and how it can be created or improved upon.

GET MORE INFO: RESOURCES ON SAFETY

- International News Safety Institute: www.newssafety.com
- Committee to Protect Journalists: www.cpj.org
- Dart Center for Journalism & Trauma: www.dartcenter.org
- Digital Journalist: www.digitaljournalist.org
- Reporters Without Borders: www.rsf.org
- International Federation of Journalists: www.ifj.org
- Rory Peck Trust: www.rorypecktrust.org

Presenting tough decisions to staff

Amina Frense

Project manager, Southern African Broadcasting Association, former SABC news editor

When you have to present difficult management decisions to your staff, the context is vitally important and there are many factors to consider, such as what the impact will be and how this can best be ameliorated. If a proposed solution or next step is possible, all the better.

But before this, several basic steps in people management must be in place. And there may be issues around how much you are part of the difficult management decision.

I have been responsible for many personnel being deployed and expected to perform their duties in various fields of expertise. In broadcasting I have always considered my editorial responsibilities to include production and operational aspects. One has to have a clear and good working knowledge and understanding of what constitutes excellent, relevant and timeous quality broadcasting. This is not to be confused with wanting to minimise the actual hands-on responsibilities of production specialists and other staff – technical directors, executive producers and a wide range of studio and newsroom staff.

This context has to be established to gain not only expert first-hand insight, but also to establish a credible position from which to engage, challenge or present alternatives when it comes to difficult decisions. To manage effectively one cannot be on the margins, but must be in the mainstream ... or as familiar with it as possible.

Also if staff are familiar with some of your vision, values and personal practices as their manager it is far easier to communicate appropriately, even if the most difficult decisions have to be presented.

In each case the how, to whom and impact of the communication will change: you need to draw up a checklist of pros and cons to guide you.

You may not always agree with the management decision that you must convey to staff, and then you need to think about how you deal with your own dissatisfaction.

Circumstances will dictate this. There are various levels of dissatisfaction: some which one can do something about, others not. The basic corporate responsibility of a leader needs to be understood and activated to address the situation. If this does not exist or is ineffective, alternatives have to be found. Lump it, leave it temporarily or live with it.

Your own position

How well this can be done is the question: how long can you sustain the dissatisfaction, and what impact will this have on staff and on the public?

I have been in several situations which called for difficult decisions. I was involved as an executive steering committee member in the transformation of the SABC from state to a public broadcaster. The practice of openness, accountability and respect for dissenting views in the transforming corporation was not that well appreciated when I was subsequently interviewed (by print as well as by my own broadcaster) on developments around restructuring and the outsourcing of programmes which I disagreed with. It resulted in a very public disciplinary procedure around my "management criticising management".

The point at which one decides to call it quits is when there is an irretrievable breakdown of trust, disrespect, and compromise of your ethics and principles.

HOW I SEE IT

Developing staff specialisations

Peet Kruger
Editor of *Beeld*

Plant a tree today; sit in its shade tomorrow.

That was the motto of a senior colleague in the newsroom at *Beeld* when I moved from the subs office to become a reporter.

He was referring to his contacts, of course. And making the point that if you nurture good relationships with a number of contacts, they will bring you lots of leads for great news stories.

To an extent this is what specialist writing is all about. If a journalist works in his or her "plantation" (in similar conditions for similar pay, the cynics would say) hard and smart enough, you will not only enjoy lots of "shade" in the form of great stories, but the employee concerned may even eventually become something of an expert on their chosen beat.

By editors nurturing a number of good journalists and giving them the freedom to grow in their beats, the news organisation will enjoy the combined benefits of all their contacts and their specialist knowledge.

We used to have a cartoon on the newsroom wall depicting a couple of journalists in front of a dart board. On the board, instead of the usual numbers, were subjects like local government, environment, education, health, courts, science, politics and labour.

The caption read: "On what will I be an expert today?" I still think that is one of the best arguments for specialisation.

But news organisations cannot afford a whole host of specialists on all the subjects we need to write about. To some extent, then, that cartoon will always be true of general journalism.

It may serve a newsroom well, though, to focus on at least a few specialisations which will set your organisation apart as the best source of news on those specific subjects.

Move your people around. Not so often that they cannot find the dart board, but move them until at least some find the niche where they show they may become the best in South Africa on that subject. Till then, keep on moving them. Each one of us can be the best at something.

Be practical though. It is probably of no use to have the best chess writer in the country as a paid member of staff on a general interest news outlet.

So specialise in something that really matters to your target audience.

Performance management

Peter du Toit

Deputy director of the Sol Plaatje Institute for Media Leadership, Rhodes University

How do you keep star performers going? Or turn competent performers into stars? Or poor performers into competent journalists?

These are recurring questions posed by editors from large and small media houses attending short courses at the Rhodes School of Journalism and Media Studies' Sol Plaatje Institute for Media Leadership.

There are clearly no simple answers, but some clues may be found in the following five principles gleaned from performance management (PM) literature and discussions with editors. These ideas are generally relevant to corporates with institutionalised performance evaluation systems and regular performance reviews, as well as small independents with a more ad hoc approach to managing accomplishment.

PM is a team effort

The tendency for journalists (and some editors) to think of PM as something done to staff by supervisors can undermine the most carefully developed system and the noblest intent.

Seen as an externally imposed means of control on which jobs, career prospects and money depend, PM can meet resistance and resentment. Seen collaboratively, as an opportunity for individual and corporate goal achievement, PM can motivate staff to excel.

PM is goal-orientated

PM involves the alignment of two sets of complementary performance goals: those of the company and the journalist.

Key performance areas must be understood and accepted, but should not exclude negotiation about how journalists' strengths can be most effectively deployed. Goals provide a foundation

SUCCESSION PLANNING

Successful transitions

Most editors don't appoint their successors, but the issue of managing succession across the entire editorial team can't be ignored. What if your news editor is poached at short notice? Or has a nervous breakdown? What when a key person reaches retirement age?

You can try to draw in an outsider (difficult if it's an emergency!). More profoundly, if there's no one suitable within to move up, it may be because you've neglected this management area. You need to be prepared for smooth transitions rather than crisis sink-or-swim situations.

Thinking "succession" means you have to bring issues of leadership development and risk analysis in the newsroom to the surface. That means assessing people's "readiness" to move up and preparations needed for them to do so successfully.

These two activities, however, only make sense against a backdrop of knowing what the really critical jobs are now, and the critical vacancies coming up. In turn, the strategic plan of the company will inform this assessment.

According to the textbooks, succession planning **works best** if:

- It is elaborated as a programme and communicated to the newsroom (and outsiders if need be).
- Expectations and perceptions are addressed up front. Succession planning can stimulate great speculation about who's in and who's out. (Tip: do not make promises to anyone chosen

HOW I SEE IT

for monitoring progress, evaluating achievement and identifying growth needs. To motivate high performance, goals should be specific, unambiguous, challenging and achievable, measurable and time-bound.

PM is ongoing

Regular (most often annual) reviews are important, but only part of the process.

Ongoing feedback is vital. Praise or critique should follow soon after great or sub-standard work, not left for formal reviews, but both should be recorded to aid comprehensive evaluations.

Journalists should have a clear idea of whether they are meeting expectations at all times. Annual reviews should confirm and record what they already know: there should be no surprises.

PM involves shared responsibility

Performance is a function of ability and motivation. It's also contingent on supervisor support and access to resources. Failure to accomplish goals should inspire reflection and introspection by the journalist, the immediate supervisor and the editor.

PM is about rewards and consequences

The rewards for, and consequences of, excellent and substandard performance must be unambiguous and consistently managed. Individual accomplishment needs to be recognised. Across-the-board bonuses and salary increments can reinforce mediocrity and demotivate people who excel.

In short, PM is much more than an administrative process providing employers with the paper trail they need to part company with difficult or unproductive staff – although this function should never be underestimated.

It's a way of thinking about leading and managing that focuses everyone's attention and effort on common goals.

It means getting beyond the axiom that a reporter is only as good as his or her last story, to determining what can be accomplished with the right support.

Don't try to clone yourself.

for the programme.)

- There is careful and consultative identification of candidates with the potential to occupy executive-level positions, so that choices are possible.
- The skills, values, behaviours and attitudes needed at the designated levels are made clear.
- A systematic mix of development activities is made available: briefings and debriefings, mentoring, job shadowing, research, rotations, involvement in special projects and being sent on leadership courses.
- Learning curves and timetables are clarified, with leeway for some errors.
- There is openness to, even encouragement of, candidates trying to do things differently.
- Candidates reflect on their progress and get frequent focused feedback.

As editor, never delude yourself that you can, or should, groom a clone to be your own successor.

Obstacles to be addressed: fear by incumbents that their positions are threatened; some staffers not wanting to move up the ladder.

Opportunities to be exploited: having a range of people ready to step forward when needed can lift performance as a whole; a chance to change diversity in the newsroom. – *Guy Berger*

Building a balanced newsroom

Sex discrimination in staffing contributes to lower productivity, higher staff turnover, a loss of skills and greater training costs for new staff – in short, it lowers a news organisation's profits. It also reflects in news content and the resultant loss or absence of a female audience.

Sweeping statements? Perhaps, but some studies around the world have shown this to be true. And it's funny how if you substitute the words "race" or "age" for "sex", it becomes uncontroversial – as media people we know about the importance of demographic balance and fairness, and of having a diverse staff.

In addition, a macho or highly masculine culture in your newsroom can create problems – not only in making it hard for women to succeed, but also through a hierarchical, aggressive ethos which does not promote flexibility, change, collaboration and innovation: attributes which are increasingly needed in our fast-changing media environment.

Generally, the topic of gender in newsrooms relates to both staffing and content (and their interrelationship). The focus here is only on staffing.

What follows is the experiences of working women, the problems of a male-dominant newsroom culture and some proposals for ending gender inequality.

Where it occurs

Sex discrimination in newrooms is found in at least five areas:

Seniority – more men than women in the senior positions.

Salaries – men being paid more than women for the same level of job.

Exclusion – jobs being the preserve of one gender (for example women head the lifestyle and men the politics

TRY THIS

Test your gender reality

If you really want to know what the gender reality of your newsroom is, ask your human resources department to do an audit:

LEVEL	Number of women	Modal salary (the most common grades in the sample)	Number of men	Modal salary
Junior reporters/photographers				
Mid-level reporters/subeditors/ photographers				
Senior reporters/subeditors/photographers				
Deputies and heads of departments				
Other executives/assistant editors				
Deputy editor and editor				

Having got the numbers, look at the **reporting beats**. Are men still dominant in the traditionally male preserves of politics , crime, sports and business reporting? Are women still dominating (or restricted to) lifestyle, arts, education and HIV/Aids reporting?
If there are imbalances and discrimination, you need strategies to redress these.

departments).

Stereotypes – attitudes, prejudice and sexism: the day-to-day challenges.

Sexual harassment – this is dealt with separately in this book.

DON'T BE CAUGHT NAPPING: Find out if your company has an affirmative action or empowerment policy concerning gender.

Losing skills

People who feel discriminated against are unhappy in their jobs and less productive and creative than they could be. When they can, they resign.

"In many cases they have built their careers on the premise that they have to be 'twice as good' as their male counterparts just to get their foot in the door ... The stress of working hard to keep up standards, and to forestall any negative expectations, can be debilitating," notes a survey on the status of women journalists in India.

Studies in the US, too, show that retention of women in newspapers is a problem: more women leave than men, many because their careers have stalled. They feel themselves stagnating and want new challenges. "The pipeline seems to get clogged, for example, between managing editor (38% women) and the top editorial executive position (25% female)," says a 2002 Women in Newspapers report.

DEFINITION

Sexism

Like the other "isms," sexism can be both personal and institutional. Sexism is:

- Discrimination based on gender, especially discrimination against women.
- Attitudes, conditions or behaviours that promote stereotyping of social roles based on gender, usually prejudicing women.
- The practice of domination of women.
- The belief that one sex (usually the male) is naturally superior to the other and should dominate most important areas of political, economic and social life. – *www.answers.com*

This is a problem for editors as it means valuable skills are lost. And in the long term, there are fewer experienced and skilled women to promote.

This problem was explored in the SA National Editors' Forum's "Glass Ceiling" research in 2006. Senior women who had left the media or a particular workplace gave their reasons as retrenchment, harassment, pressure, a "sense of isolation", no support base, undermining, not being taken seriously and no space for flexibility.

Masculine culture

Overall, the results of the Sanef survey concluded that in South African newsrooms, "women are still on the receiving end of discrimination". Having the right skills and experience is still not enough for women to succeed.

In addition, the survey found that although women were highly aware of this, men were mostly in denial or did not think it was important – as evidenced by some of their responses but also by the fact that so few men agreed to do the survey (about 15% of those approached, compared to over 50% of women responding).

On a more positive note, the Sanef survey found some lessening in prejudice about women being managers in editorial environments.

But most women reported that the newsroom culture was still masculine and that more than a decade into the "new SA" with its legislated equality, the "men's club" still held power.

Top newsmen build informal networks that subtly exclude women – for example, the male editor invites only men to eat with him in the canteen at lunchtime – and, unknown to him, all the women in his newsroom talk about this!

It is often in these informal networks that mentoring and the exchange of information occurs, both of which help the less senior men improve their leadership skills. The network also gives men more opportunities to promote themselves and their ideas.

A male or macho culture favours aggressive behaviour, such as competition based on put-downs and ridiculing rather than being based on talent and achievement.

For many, this is experienced as an environment which criticises but does not nurture or encourage successful behaviours. Negative dominates over positive: as at school, you learn that if you are not in trouble then you are probably doing okay. Depending on the person, it may not elicit greater achievement – just continued mediocre work.

MORE INFO

Behavioural styles

Passive = deferential to others
Passive/Aggressive = initial deference, followed by aggression
Assertive = balance your needs/rights with those of others
Aggressive = no concern for the needs/rights of others

Superiority and entitlement

There are still some men in newsrooms who believe they are superior and entitled to preference and privilege, particularly over black women.

Where women are in charge such men are rude or outspoken; with male bosses they are deferential or respectful. Their sexism shows up clearly in their differing approaches to bosses of different genders.

There is also more covert prejudice: women's opinions not being taken seriously. You can spot this when females speak up or give a dissenting view: they may be teased or jokes are made – often in an affectionate voice, which is hard to counter but is nonetheless experienced as demeaning.

Research from various countries reveals the same problems around the world.

A survey of print journalists in India listed the following barriers to opportunity for women journalists:

- Newspapers are high-pressure environments where male gender, talent and hustle are incontrovertible tickets to success.
- Women are sometimes hampered because they refuse to assimilate into the work culture and then have to behave aggressively in order to promote their work.
- Women journalists face daunting stereotypes about their abilities.

Glass ceiling

The 2002 US report already mentioned gives the following five factors which block women, or create a "glass ceiling":

- Exclusionary informal networks
- Male stereotyping and preconceptions
- Lack of management and line experience
- Inhospitable corporate culture
- Too little time in the pipeline

This ties in with the "lack of political will" raised by the Sanef survey: in the past, and still in some white working environments today, the same factors blocked black people from being promoted.

Similarly, therefore, this suggests that playing fields will only be evened through the implementation of empowerment policies and forced change.

Interestingly, both senior women and men in SA newsrooms mostly did not even know whether their companies had gender affirmative action policies.

Women who succeed

Yet some women rise to the top.

The Indian survey reports: "The fact is that there are also those who have developed a tangible strategy for negotiating their careers. They say they are determined to concentrate on their goals, to not walk into every setting expecting to be harassed or discriminated against, and to stay focused on career advancement."

The 2002 US study found that women in senior positions had common characteristics: "They developed self-confidence at an early age; their personal lives were equally as or more important than their careers; they thrive

USEFUL TIP

Negotiating strategies for women

Many women think good work will automatically be rewarded, and do not want to damage their relationship with their boss by being too demanding. But it is possible to negotiate and keep a good relationship:

"**First** assess your own goals, priorities and limitations and those on the other side before you come to the table.

"**Then** make the first offer, to anchor the discussion.

"**Next**, highlight the advantages for the other side and the value you provide.

"**Finally**, make multiple offers to signal your flexibility and willingness to make concessions (on issues that aren't top priorities for you)." – *From "Women in Media 2006"*

on new challenges; a mentor has helped them; and their lifestyles are flexible."

Leaders of change

A subsequent US study ("Women in Media 2006") looked at the skills and strategies of good leaders – noting that with rapid market and technology changes, leaders need to be able to continually take risks and innovate.

They found that here women have an advantage over men: in general their management style is "inclusive and collaborative, rather than hierarchical", which encourages new ideas, innovations and change. Also, they are often new to power positions, so are not stuck in old ways of doing things.

For this reason in particular, many big businesses employ women in top positions: media companies might find they need to do the same.

Parenting

Once a parent, always a parent ... but in practice parenting leads to disruptive demands on workers only for a limited period of their working lives; the demands usually being heaviest when children are little.

Illnesses, lifts and school holidays are recurring issues, but other occasions also arise when parents need to be absent from work to attend to the needs of their children. Some events can be planned for, others happen unexpectedly – but it helps if editorial management is prepared to have some flexibility regarding working hours.

Can the editorial workplace become more conducive to balancing work and family responsibilities? Although women often say they left the media because of this problem, it is one that also affects men involved in parenting.

In the Sanef survey, "family responsibilities" was cited as one of the obstacles to women becoming senior editors. The 2002 US study found that among women in newspapers, balancing work and family "was a topic of both discomfort and passion".

In looking for solutions, two are commonly cited:

- Flexi-time
- On-site child care facilities

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- International Women's Media Foundation (IWMF) – go to their website for online training, tips and guides, and training resources. It also has an Africa programme. www.iwmf.org

Many studies note that women understand that journalism is not a nine-to-five job: it is a demanding career because stories happen at any time.

However, some media jobs fit in with parenting better than others. It is easier to be a subeditor, rather than a reporter, when your children are young because working hours are more predictable.

Advice for parents

The best advice: to succeed as a parent and a journalist requires a strong support system that the individual must put in place:

- At home – have a dependable support and backup network including, where possible, extended family, friends, child-minder and spouse.
- At work – build an understanding relationship with your boss.

As editor, it is possible to make it easier for staff to juggle responsibilities by having family-friendly newsroom policies beyond maternity and family responsibility leave (which are now standard rights for parents in South Africa).

Finding solutions

Besides the need for companies to commit to fostering change, and to promote gender affirmative action and favourable family policies, the Sanef survey includes in its list of strategies for the advancement of women in newsrooms:

- General conscientising
- Building allies (also among women)
- Training and development programmes
- Career-pathing.

In addition, the 2002 US study says that to retain the talents of top women, companies should provide role-models and mentors.

Mentoring for assertiveness

"Women in power need to mentor the women coming up. That's very important, and it doesn't happen enough," writes Bonnie Pfister of the Association for Women Journalists in the US. Women need to build alliances among themselves, and advocate for themselves and each other, and the seniors also need to coach the juniors.

"But we also need men to mentor us – because you are so often the ones in position to do so," Pfister continues.

Women who succeed in journalism say they have been helped by mentors. Having a senior mentor promotes confidence – and mentoring across the gender divide also increases understanding.

One of the most important things a mentor can help with is coaching those who believe good work is enough: they think they will eventually be recognised solely for their effort or quality output. They must learn it is simply not enough.

Mentors must help such people to learn to sell the bosses on their work. They need to be able to walk into the boss's office, or approach him/her informally in the hallway, to promote their story or work idea.

Many women find it difficult to ensure they get recognition for their work or leadership role. They fear appearing arrogant or self-interested, and are passive rather than assertive in an aggressive, male-dominated environment.

Quiet talent

In newsrooms with a masculine culture, men are more likely to believe they are tackling the top story of the day, or men might be routinely given the top stories to cover.

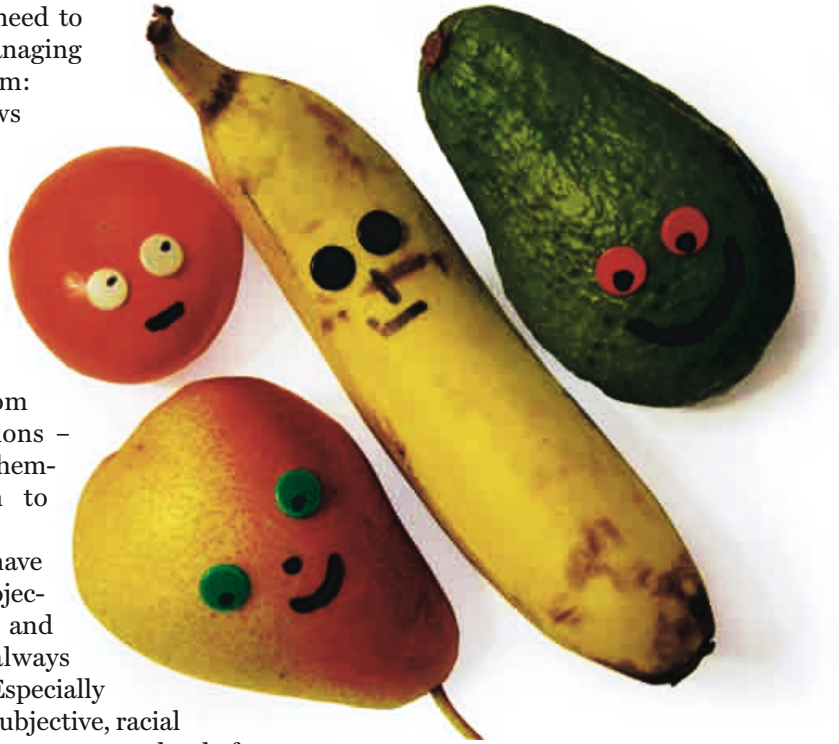
But editors need to look beyond those who loudly promote themselves, and often appear at their office doors, if they seek to nurture and promote talent.

There are probably women in your newsroom – or men who have a different racial/cultural approach – who are quietly and competently doing excellent work, "just minus the sense of entitlement or self-promotion that your usual reliable high-achievers use to get your attention", writes Pfister.

With a bit of attention and nurturing, they can provide the top-selling stories, or strong management skills, innovation and change, that you as an editor need.

– Elizabeth Barratt

Complexities and solutions



Here's what you need to know about managing race in the newsroom:

Everyone knows that historical realities of race have ongoing effects on people's outlooks, language, street sense and skill sets. But that's a different matter from subjective perceptions – the way people see themselves in relation to racial categories.

So race issues have two dimensions – objective and subjective, and the two do not always directly correlate. Especially in the realm of the subjective, racial identity isn't fixed as a permanent level of consciousness. Sometimes it's strong, sometimes it's absent.

Because of this, race can never be wholly reliable as a predictor of how South Africans will think and act. And given that race also often coincides with other issues – such as power, privilege, skills, culture and language – only a poor editor will judge people simply according to race.

When race identity comes into play, it often comes with a bite. At such times, people's sense of being, their histories and futures, even loyalties to grandmas and grandpas, all converge along undiluted colour lines. Yet tense conflation like this is equally capable of subsiding.

Mostly, race consciousness flares up because of deeper factors. Skin colour gets taken to signify cause, although it is often just a crudely convenient line along which divisions cleave and explanations are believed to reside.

More deeply, race often serves as a lightning rod for exploding anger, cumulative frustrations and multiplying misconceptions. Phenomena like these are not necessarily, or irrevocably, connected to race – it just supercharges them.

The editor's challenge is to untangle the knot.

Even if tensions take a racial form, and even where these take on a life of their own, editors need to address the underlying substance. Avoid the quick-'n-easy reading, and get to the root causes. Remove the reasons that issues get racialised in the first place.

In other words, don't fall for a racial analysis of what may seem to be a racial situation, because skin colour is no more than an uncertain signal.

Subtle racism

Racial insult, like sexual harassment, is 100% intolerable, and a dismissable offence. No debate.

The bigger challenge is subtle racism – for example, when black journalists have to swim upstream against unspoken assumptions about them, unlike many white counterparts who can get ahead simply by floating with the flow.

It's the same as women having to

work twice as hard as men, just to prove they are equal to the job. Presumptions favour one set of people as a class, and doubt another.

Addressing subtle racism is a long haul. You need workplace guidelines (including for reporting on race). Best to elicit these from newsroom brainstorms, or at least get them refreshed or revised there from time to time. Don't pass by opportune moments to bring it into the open – even into formal sessions, such as convening lunchtime meetings to discuss the dynamics. You could also, for instance, stage a debate when newsroom views partition along racial or ethnic lines. Alternatively, have a discussion about the relevance of race within a particularly cloudy story. Ask your Kenyan editor counterparts: you don't want to wait for an eruption which hardens identities all around.

Sensitisation

It can help to use outsiders to bring to the surface issues such as racism within the news. This being SA, there is also automatically good cause to run general sen-

> "Because they were white newspapers, they reported white names but only black statistics."
>
> – Aggrey Klaaste, former editor of *Sowetan*

POLICY

The *Sunday Times*' Code of Conduct advises

When race is the central issue of a story, racial identifications should be used only when they are important to readers' understanding of what has happened and why it has happened;

- Do not unjustifiably offend others in reporting on sensitive issues relating to race, religion or cultural difference;
- Do not use language or pictures that are offensive, reinforce stereotypes or fuel prejudice or xenophobia;

The *Sunday Times* race checklist includes:

- Has this report been treated differently because of race? If so, why? Is this justified?
- Is the report – even if factually correct – likely to fuel xenophobia or prejudice? If so, is this justified? Is there any way around this?
- What about the voices in the story? Have we actively sought diverse opinions from ordinary people and experts alike?

Poynter Institute's Keith Woods urges journalists to flag every racial reference and ask these questions:

- Is it relevant? Just because people in conflict are of different races does not mean that race is the source of their dispute. An article about interracial dating, however, is a story about race.
- Have I explained the relevance?
- Are racial identifiers used evenly?
- Is it free of euphemisms?
- Should I consult someone of another race/ethnicity?

sitisation workshops on a repeated basis.

Most journalists probably don't want to adversely prejudge individuals on the basis of skin colour. Some who are racist are often not self-aware in this regard. It takes an ongoing process to educate them and to get rid of such deep-rooted assumptions.

Progress can be made in terms of nuancing people's consciousness about race. In turn, that will help not just newsroom dynamics, but also the long-term

DEFINITIONS

Race-track: what position do you agree with?

It's a close call between theoretical views of race. Tick the box or boxes that most express your understanding:

RACES DO NOT EQUAL RACISM	OR	THE IDEA OF RACE LEADS TO RACISM
☐ Racial differentiation – distinguishing races and their purported members – is not in and of itself racist. Describing a difference does not constitute racism ... a person becomes racist only by deploying a difference to denigrate the other.		☐ Racial niching of media audiences risks reproducing a segregationist outlook where each racial "community" is deemed to be interested only in its "own affairs". In this, news of "other" races is not news for the targeted race. In racial media, some races are more valued than others. That's racist. It would be reactionary to assume that colour is coterminous with culture. Why then distinguish races – unless, ultimately, a racial reification or even hierarchy is at play? In this view, it is hard to find a "logic" of racial difference on its own. Even recognising race for the purposes of redress can risk the danger of racial categories being reinforced rather than being reduced as equity unfolds.
RACE IS EMPOWERING	**OR**	**RACE IS TYRANNY**
☐ Often, racial identity reflects how others really treat you, so you might as well recognise who you are. Embracing a racial identity gives you something to hold on to and leverage.		☐ Race identity tends towards a tyranny that conscripts individuals to specific "scripts". Racial conformity trumps individuality and it coerces people into closed camps.
RACE IS ABOUT SAME-NESS	**OR**	**RACE IS ABOUT DIVISION**
☐ Racial identity implies skin-based unity – a perception of belonging together. Although race provides homes for racial "insiders", this does not eliminate other – shared – identities (eg "black *man*, white *South African*, *Catholic* coloured").		☐ Racial solidarity defines Otherness, and therefore excludes anyone different. For instance, blacks are defined in relation to whites, and vice versa. To claim membership of one racial identity is to make others erect walls.

goal of moving South Africa to a point where people can relate to each other without race having serious significant relevance. To stay in the rut of seeing South Africa as statically multiracial, serves only to delay that day.

Wider diversity

Diversity is usually a code-word for difference along racial lines. But don't limit the concept to being a synonym for race. Instead, be alert to the full range of identities and experiences in your newsroom.

For instance, sensitivity to diversity can highlight meaningful distinctions between those who are parents and those who are not. It draws attention to the varying linguistic and knowledge bases. Think, too, of the spectrum of sexualities, ages, incomes, states of health and neighbourhood of residence. Even hobbies can be surprisingly diverse.

All this is an asset in a newsroom because differences are what adds richness to the whole. Bringing diversity into the open among staff helps each person to better understand their distinctiveness – as well as the range of living differences among their peers. That means self-aware journalists who can better understand the breadth of SA society and their specific space within it.

But also avoid the trap of regarding each person as just one "sort" of human within the wider mix. For example, many journalists in a newsroom may share attitudes towards religion, but have a lot of variation in experience of travel. The point is that delineation configures people in different ways – creating multiple commonalities and differences. Diversity, in short, is diverse!

Continual change

Also, beware of treating diversity as if a person's traits and differences stay the same. A parent's status changes, so can a person's experience of place. It's just like avoiding the notion of "race relations" which can incorrectly imply that there are permanent and homogenous groups fixed along colour lines. (That notion misses the huge dynamism around what it means to be Indian or African in a changing country). Diversity is a changing chameleon.

Using diversity

Editors, to sum up, can value difference in the newsroom, without reifying it.

It should go without saying: don't deploy journalists as if one particular aspect of their diversity predisposes them towards a given beat.

On the contrary: a sports-fan covering politics can expand diversity, and throw new light on the story. Likewise a straight person covering a gay parade.

– Guy Berger

MORE INFO

Code of Conduct

Discrimination: A newspaper should not place gratuitous emphasis on the race, nationality, religion, colour, country of origin, gender, sexual preferences, marital status, political views or intellectual or physical disability of either individuals or groups, unless the fact is relevant.

– Press Code

READ FURTHER

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Memmi, A. 2000. *Racism*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

SA Human Rights Commission: http://www.sahrc.org.za

Wievorka, M. 1995. *The Arena of Racism*. London: Sage.

Tackling the hardest staff issues

Managing editorial staff is all about providing good leadership and motivating them to reach better and higher levels of quality, right?

It would be wonderful if that was the total reality. But you are dealing with a bunch of individuals with issues all of their own. This is what you and your department heads must manage.

Ask any bunch of managers what staff problems they hate having to deal with, and the answers will be something like this:

- Personal problems brought to work
- Sick for no reason
- Improper clothes
- Drinking at lunchtime
- Conflict between staff
- Dead wood
- Accusations of sexual harassment
- "Bad attitude"
- Disappearing from work
- Lack of concentration
- Not doing what they were told to do

As editorial managers, we want to produce the best content we can ... we don't want to deal with all these headaches! Didn't anyone teach these journalists what the world of work is about? Unfortunately this is often not the case: then it becomes your job.

If you know how to do it well, you waste less emotional and admin time in the long run.

Even better, if your staff are clear on the rules, problems can be dealt with more quickly.

It is well worth getting this non-editorial information down pat, in order to improve your own efficiency in managing staff.

Info you need

Many new managers think labour laws are complicated: what if I say the wrong thing, what if we get taken to the CCMA? (Commission for Conciliation, Mediation and Arbitration – these are distinct activities).

Ask any bunch of editorial managers how to deal with the list of problems above and you will find knowledge gaps. And often a sense of powerlessness.

You need to know certain things about labour law and your company's own policies so you can act with confidence in managing staff. Know your rights: get training on this.

Confidence is the key – why would you not want to be confident in this part of the job?

Ensure all your editorial managers are trained too, and you can mostly leave them to do the job.

What you, and they, need to know about are:

- The Basic Conditions of Employment Act
- The Labour Relations Act
- Your company's disciplinary code
- Your company's disciplinary policy and procedures
- Your editorial code of conduct or ethics
- The codes of the Press Ombudsman or the Broadcasting Complaints Commission

Is there training?

You can get all you need to know in two or three days of training and a couple of hours of reading.

Ask your HR department to provide this training – or find yourself an external course. Do not be embarrassed if your own editor never ensured you were trained – or if you are, pretend that you

HANDY HINT

Staff need to know

How does an employee know what is against the rules?

Each must be given, and sign for, copies of:

- The company's disciplinary code
- Your editorial code of conduct
- Any other company policies and rules (eg Rules for using company cars, sexual harassment policy, IT policies)

just need an update! Send all your managers as well.

Disciplinary procedures

For any employee, there are basic rules. Any breaking of these is "misconduct". The quicker you clamp down on misconduct, the quicker it will go away. Or the quicker that person will leave.

Think about your aims as an editor: one of them is to have a newsroom of star performers. You know you need some sloggers as well. But how many problem children, who produce one brilliant story or page layout or photograph a year, can you retain?

In each person's work contract, the following are implied:

- It is a voluntary agreement.
- They provide personal services/outputs.
- There is remuneration.
- Subordination (they have bosses whom they must obey).

Your company's disciplinary code and procedures will lay down the steps you take to discipline someone; what must be done before and during a disciplinary hearing; and what sanctions are likely for what offences.

Offences can be minor, serious or very serious. With minor offences, counselling or a disciplinary interview is usually the first step, to try to correct the behaviour. With serious or repeat offences, a disciplinary hearing must be held. In each case, records must be kept and go in the individual's personnel file.

The biggest slip-up that can be made is unfairness – in your training you will learn how to ensure both "substantive" and "procedural" fairness.

If you are lenient as a manager, or you do not treat all staff equally fairly, you are contributing to the problems and can find yourself in serious difficulty with labour cases.

Grievance procedures

If an employee is unhappy with something in the workplace, this is the route for them to resolve it. They can take up any issue which prevents them from working well or affects their safety.

However, in reality, few full-scale grievance cases are heard in companies: most are resolved through informal discussions before they get to a hearing (see "Aggrieved staffers" on page 53).

Incapacity procedures

These cases are even rarer: there are procedures to be followed in cases of long-term illness, consistently poor performance and unacceptable absence from work that results in unsatisfactory performance. They usually involve consultation rather than a hearing.

– Elizabeth Barratt
(with information drawn from Media24's managing employee relations workshop)

READ THIS

Avoid mistakes

Beware of **constructive dismissal.** A common case goes like this:

A staffer is caught stealing, which in your disciplinary code is a dismissable offence.

The manager tells the staffer: "I suggest you just resign so that we don't have to go through a hearing, at which you will be dismissed anyway."

The employee resigns – and takes the company to the CCMA: it is constructive dismissal because the employer has made the continuation of the service relationship unbearable through bullying or vicimisation tactics.

You will lose the case.

On the other hand, if the staffer asks to resign and this really is voluntary (the manager has not hinted at it), the employer cannot refuse.

Get it in writing.

But the employer can insist on the person serving out their 30 days' notice and still take the case to the police.

In this case, justice is served.

ABSENTEEISM

How to handle the 'sickies'

Your staff need to know what is expected of them if they get sick.

For example, they need to phone (not SMS) their boss, if possible before the time they would start work or within an hour of the starting time, and they cannot get someone else to phone unless they are incapacitated.

Not following such rules – or just not turning up for work – are disciplinary issues.

However, if a person is frequently off work for short periods because of illness, this has to be managed differently.

It is a problem for you as editor because you need that person to do the work assigned to them, and they have a responsibility to provide that service and output (their contract).

It is a problem for their colleagues, who may regularly have to do someone else's work as well as their own – or their manager, who has to find freelance or dash workers at short notice and possibly go over budget.

But it may require some empathy and long-term help, as the problem might be a serious one: this can be a symptom of issues ranging from HIV/Aids or another chronic illness, to alcoholism or domestic abuse.

What to do

The most important thing is to keep records: ensure that every time any staffer is sick, the leave book is filled in. Then if you suspect a problem, you have all the facts at hand.

MORE INFO

How much sick leave?

A company's policy may be more lenient, but the Basic Conditions of Employment Act allows:

- During the first six months, one day's sick leave for every 26 days worked.
- Thereafter, 30 days "normal" paid sick leave over a three-year cycle.

First symptoms of a problem

Look for these signs:

- Sick leave is always taken for short periods.
- The total is unusually high, such as 10 days in three months.
- There are different medical reasons each time: flu, diarrhoea, nausea, headache, back trouble.

Then you need to look for trends, such as whether this always occurs after pay day or after the weekend; whether the person also takes many single days of annual leave; what their work performance is like; and whether they are slack at time-keeping or sloppy in their personal appearance.

Taking action

Once you have had a look at the situation, it is time for a formal chat:

- Tell him or her how often they have been sick – what the records say – and explain that you are concerned both about them and the impact it has on their colleagues.
- Ask them to explain. Then discuss whatever personal problems they bring up and offer to get your human resources people to help (depending on what employee assistance programme your company has).
- Follow this up with a first "sick leave letter" confirming your discussion and decisions.
- If the problem continues in the next month or so, have another discussion and write a second letter.
- Next time they are sick, pay a surprise visit to their home.

In many cases, the person will now take action to sort things out. But in other cases there is just no quick fix, as the underlying problem is a difficult one and expert help must be sought.

– Elizabeth Barratt

(with information drawn from Media24's managing employee relations workshop)

SEXUAL HARASSMENT

Why it's time to take a stand

This is a tricky area. Even finding a definition is not straightforward, but here is a short one: "Sexual harassment is inappropriate, unwanted advances of a sexual nature."

The media like to report on sexual harassment cases, but no one likes to confront it in their own building. Bosses are often seen as being slow or reluctant to act – despite rumours disrupting work. And it is hard to consider dismissing someone whom you may have thought of as skilled journalist.

It is particularly tricky when it involves a boss and a subordinate, or two people who have had a relationship and one of them now wants it to end.

However, it is seldom that a victim will speak up without having a real complaint – and usually this person is reticent and needs support. So unless you have concrete reasons to disbelieve them, support the complainant: beware of secondary victimisation. On the rare occasion that a person is unjustly accused, the process you follow will vindicate them.

There are three big reasons why an editor MUST act on a harassment complaint – whether it comes from the person allegedly victimised or a colleague:

1. **Legal** – to provide a safe work environment and no unfair discrimination.
2. **Moral** – to effectively protect victims.
3. **Management** – to have teams that can work effectively and productively.

Policy

Most big South African companies now have sexual harassment policies and procedures, to protect themselves against any legal action. They know it cannot be ignored: a few companies have had to pay thousands of rands for not taking action!

Your policy should spell out the definitions and the complexities – it is important to read it.

It should also spell out what action will be taken against a complainant if accusations are found to be malicious, and what protection the victim is entitled to so secondary victimisation is avoided.

The complainant, or someone they have asked to act for them, can report the issue with the request that it be dealt with informally, or formally as a grievance. Either way, the complaint must be investigated and evidence gathered as in any other employee relations case.

Then go through further procedures based on whether it is informal (consultations) or formal (grievance hearing).

Wider impact

Once the issue is settled fairly, as editor you need to think about the wider impact the case has had on your staff, who will have been discussing more rumours than facts. Is it a time to provide leadership?

Consider calling an impromptu staff meeting: not to give details of the case, but to assure everyone that it has been dealt with fairly, to spell out the kinds of behaviours that will not be tolerated, to encourage people to report such cases and discourage a culture of silence, and to show you are serious that victims (usually women) will be protected.

– Elizabeth Barratt

TO CLARIFY

It isn't lust, it's power

- "Women who say they've been victimised agree, noting that whatever else it may be, sexual harassment is not 'sexy'.
- "They say the problem with men who harass is that they don't like women, not that they like women too much. It's a useful distinction, given that even some newsmen persist in thinking the issue is about workplace flirtation.
- "In fact, say experts, it is unwelcome attention based on a person's gender that constitutes harassment; there need be nothing overtly sexual about it." – *Carolyn Weaver in American Journalism Review, September 1992 article: "A secret no more".*

Training for editors

Paddi Clay

Head of the Avusa Pearson journalism training programme

Here are some things I'd like to see editors take on board if they want to get real benefits from training:

- Training is not a cure for all that ails your staff or your organisation.

I saw it being misused recently to offset the confusion and insecurity caused by the messy reorganisation of a newsroom. The staff knew they were being thrown a bone while their future was undecided. When they came back, and were given no opportunity to apply what they'd learned, they were even more down-in-the-mouth.

That's another thing to avoid. If your staff cannot apply their new skills soon after they return from training, it is just one big waste of money. If there also aren't seniors who know what the training covered and can act as coaches, the benefits of the training won't be maximised.

In fact you may just be giving your newly trained staffers an incentive to look elsewhere for a place that will let them apply their newly acquired skill.

- Training is a strategic tool that needs to be used strategically – but editorial environments sometimes have a far too laissez faire attitude.

I sometimes get "wish lists" from editorial of the training various staffers want. By rights, these should arise out of thorough performance appraisals in which the needs of the editorial operation and the journalist have been matched. Training needs should reflect what people need to do their work better, develop their usefulness to the company and, given the skills shortage that exists in the media, to the industry as a whole.

You have to find a balance, though, and guard against any perception that a chosen few are hogging what's left of the training budget, unless of course you have deliberately put them on a fast-track path.

While it would be great if people simply took up the training offers you put before them, some training does need to be made mandatory or a prerequisite for any promotion or for progress.

Formal induction sessions for new hires could also be put to better use by editorial – but we waste this opportunity by simply handing it over to HR to drone on about medical aid and pensions.

Staff must also be "freed up" to learn – and ideally, if they're to be relied on for innovation, they need to be accorded some "playtime" with the new technologies or concepts. That may seem impos-

HANDY HINT

Better training

Experience of "The learning newsroom project" is that training improved when it was:

- Linked to strategic goals.
- Measured.
- Driven by staff input.
- Expanded beyond traditional topics.
- Tied to employee performance management, including annual evaluations.

– *www.learningnewsroom.org*

MORE INFO

Websites on training

www.asne.org/index.cfm?ID=4849
www.notrain-nogain.org
www.businessjournalism.org
www.poynter.org
www.naa.org

MY EXPERIENCE

> If you really do believe newsrooms need to reinvent themselves, and you don't back it up with training, it's smoke and mirrors.
>
> – Ex-editor and publisher Dana Robbins

sible given your operational needs and staff shortage but a good manager should be able to make a plan to cover absences, whether for leave, sickness or training.

Be aware

A health warning: be aware that good training can often unleash a degree of anarchy; there is no way of completely controlling its outcome. Good training, of even one individual, can have a knock-on effect and lead to changes in the way things are done or even in thinking.

To prepare for this I'd advise you or your senior staff to be the first to take up relevant training offers. At the least you could pop in – if the trainer allows – to see what it is about. What could be better for inculcating a learning and development culture in your newsroom than senior staff who eagerly seize every relevant training opportunity themselves? That's not an admission of ignorance but a strategic and wise way of keeping one step ahead.

Start at the top

It is time to come clean on training because it is not just something for those at the bottom of the ladder; it is also for those at the top. Can you, an editor, honestly say you know it all? If the answer is "no", when last did you yourself get some training or set out deliberately to learn something new?

Perhaps, too, you should reflect on your budget process. Isn't the training budget line always the first to get the chop when you're under pressure to make cuts?

TIPS

Strategy for effective learning programmes

1. Ensure the newsroom's goals are what drive training decisions.
2. Make someone the training coordinator, even if not a full-time focus.
3. Engage the staff – to assess needs, create training policy principles, and develop programmes.
4. Illustrate and communicate the specific goals of the training.
5. Link your newsroom training needs to culture, market challenges, capacity and leadership development needs.
6. Identify trainers (including from among staff) and develop modules with practical components.
7. Clarify expectations for participation in programmes by the staff (for example what report-backs and self-assessments must be done, and when).
8. Create a long-range training calendar to ensure continuous learning and avoid last-minute decisions.
9. Define what impact you want in terms of staff's attitude, knowledge, skill and the effect on news product.
10. Recognise that measuring those impacts is tough, but you should still implement some form of assessment.

– Guy Berger
(adapted from newsimproved.org)

Running an editors' school

Ferial Haffajee
Editor of the *Mail & Guardian*

After two years of trying to train editors, I can say only this: it is not as easy as growing my potted herbs.

You don't just throw out a few seeds of knowledge, water occasionally and then put into the editorial pot to make delicious journalistic stews.

Two years ago, I thought I'd had a brainwave to assist the *Mail & Guardian*'s succession plan: start an in-house editor training project! I did this because I had been thrown in at the deep end. So I planned a syllabus that would teach the skills I had found essential since becoming editor.

In a nutshell these were:

- Hard skills of diary construction, chairing news conferences, chairing leader meetings, page planning, and so on.
- Harder skills like editing copy, making deadlines, dealing with advertising, working with the subs desk.
- Even harder skills like talent management in a skills-poor economy, dealing with poaching, developing trainee journalists through mentoring and coaching.
- Softer but important skills like public speaking, radio and television commentary.
- Business skills of understanding the entire publishing experience. I didn't want the next generation to be like an old editor who thought (delightfully but wrongly) that you could set your own editorial-to-advertising mix simply by diktat with scarce account of weekly revenues.

> "I did this because I had been thrown in at the deep end."

We decided that this would be accomplished through a mix of in-house training and attendance at courses including those run by the Sol Plaatje Institute at Rhodes University, the Institute for Journalism in association with the Poynter Institute and Wits University's nascent media management course.

The formal courses worked really well and were the most useful in sprouting the next generation.

The in-house training was extremely difficult to execute as the talent pool felt that it was too hard an ask to expect them to meet regularly in syndicates and meet deadlines on assignment tasks on top of already chockfull work platters. Most seniors at the *Mail & Guardian* perform the work of two people in older, more luxurious newsrooms.

I am now considering how, in a resource-poor environment, we shall carry out the essential work of training future editors.

My fellow trainer feels the project was a flop because each component was not completed. But I see a group of people who are good on radio, comfortable on television, can write leaders (with varying degrees of flow and style I must add), understand most aspects of publishing and can, at a push, run the newspaper quite adequately.

Most vitally, I see a group of people who are paid decently (but not grandly) and who have seen the magic of creating good journalism.

And that is gratifying enough to push on with my project.

SOME ADVICE

An insolent editor?

When I talked my way into my first job, my training was to be insulted and humiliated by old men who smoked and drank and passed on outdated practices. I got fired for insolence. That was my training.

When I became an editor, I resolved I would not let my staff go through that experience. I persuaded management that the chairman would not let his Mercedes be driven by a driver without experience or training; why then did he let incompetents drive his newspaper? Today, in the name of economy, management are letting loose children to do grown-ups' jobs.

Incompetence is not a disparaging word: it means a lack of competency. I went to a lot of trouble persuading management that untrained staff were a false economy.

Today's managements don't hesitate to compromise the product by cutting staff and foreign bureaux. But when the price of cocoa beans goes up, the makers of Mars bars pay, because they want a quality product.

In the newspaper management culture, the first opportunity is one to slash budgets. "Where's the training scheme?" Most of us have suffered very badly in this way, even terminally.

How do we measure a newspaper's health?

- Is your newspaper ideas-led?
- Is your newspaper a powerhouse of ideas, or just passively processing what comes in?
- Do you challenge new staff, or is your training policy to sit them down next to the most incompetent journalist because he is the only one with time to talk to them?
- Is your problem thinking up ideas?

If your answer is yes to any of these questions, you have newspaper needing attention. If your answer is yes to all, it won't be in business for too long.

– Neville Stack, a retired UK editor who did extensive training in South Africa during the 1990s.

> When our employees go away for company-paid training, they are expected to share what they learned with staff upon their return.

– Rod Spaw, training editor (cited by Vickey Williams in *All Eyes Forward*)

Mentoring in the newsroom

Heather Butler

Founding principal of the Caxton Cadet School

"What do you call boobs in the paper?" asks the journo.

"Gremlins," replies the editor.

"No, boobs, boobs," says the journo, cupping her hands over her chest.

"Breasts," barks the editor.

Mentorship or instruction? There's a fine line and it's all about attitude.

Gone are the days when an editor demands a rewrite without explanation. Thank goodness.

Mentoring in the newsroom is about communication. It's astonishing that journalists are in the business of communication yet often fail to communicate with each other.

An editor's job involves setting standards, which can only be kept by constant monitoring and mentoring.

So how do we do this?

- Open-door policy.
- Watch your body language.
- Don't be impatient.

All sounds so easy, but when you're on deadline, the phone is ringing and your journalist is having trouble with an intro, it's good to have mentoring in mind.

All the training by that stage should have been done but there is such a thing as writers' block; or deciding between different intros.

Mentoring starts with communication. At news diary meetings the editor should outline exactly what is wanted, including the angle to be taken. It is important to guide the person tackling the story so when you are on deadline there is no confusion.

MORE INFO

Get maximum impact

Much mentoring takes place sporadically or emerges informally within a relationship.

The following principles apply especially to more formally declared and deliberately instituted mentorships, but have relevance to everyday relationships as well:

- Mentoring means being there for someone: it is usually one-on-one dialogue around career development.
- Neither party can be artificially made to relate to each other: a willing and open relationship has to underpin mentoring.
- One of the most important roles of a mentor is to be a confidential and trusted sounding-board, and only to a lesser extent being a guide or adviser.
- Mentors should not assume that they have, or should have, more knowledge than the "mentee". The mentee should not be treated as a potential protégé.
- Mentors contribute experience to a relationship, but can expect also to learn much from it.
- Mentoring is not about hierarchy as such; it is about helping the mentee make their own decisions rather than expecting them to follow the mentor's advice.
- Formal mentoring needs a time-frame, and parameters defined in terms of the job – in other words, personal issues are explicitly excluded.
- Formal mentorships should include scheduled joint reflection on the progress of the relationship.
- Mentoring takes time and commitment.

– Guy Berger

AS I SEE IT

That guidance can take the form of mentoring – and guidance and support is quite different from spoon-feeding, or doing the job for someone who is battling.

If you do the job once for a journalist and colleague, you'll do it always, and they'll learn nothing.

Mentoring is "authoritative support" and should be a positive learning experience. Mentorship should equip journalists with the ability to produce the goods on time.

It is a little like counselling – having empathy; letting the journalist cry if an emotion-filled situation presents itself. We're all human.

Some years ago a journalist was sent out to a crash scene. It was awful – bodies everywhere. The journalist had previously lost two brothers in a car crash. The scene brought back her own personal loss. No matter the deadline, it was necessary for that journalist to be allowed to cry. A five-minute cry, letting it all out in the editor's office, resulted in a stirring article which touched every reader concerned about road safety.

An editor cannot be remote from the newsroom. Being part of the newsroom and "steering the ship" through mentorship, makes for good news flow. Mentorship should impart passion; stimulate the thrill of chasing a story; inspire perseverance.

Journalists should be encouraged to discuss their stories. "Talk back" sessions, dubbed news diary meetings, when ideas are bandied about with much banter, are essential. This is where and when you give moral support, encouragement and ideas for sourcing a story as well as for its presentation.

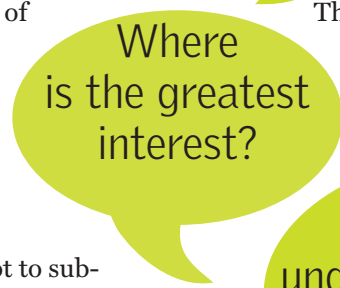
Mentoring isn't always one-on-one, but should always be about achievement – and often should be fun.

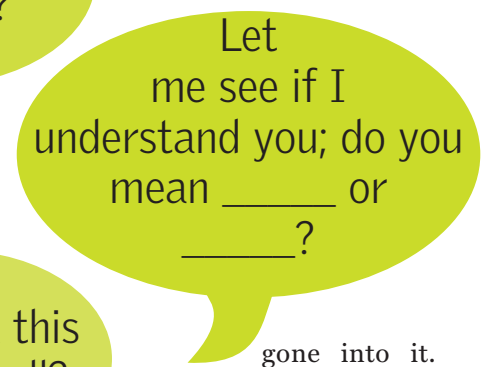
(Butler is the retired group editor of Caxton Durban newspapers)

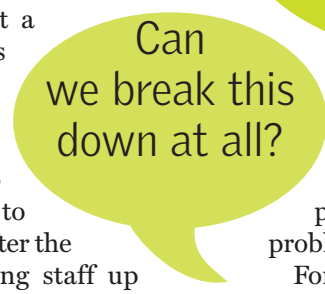
"Good editors are discovering that the traditional, top-down 'I-paid-my-dues-and-now-it's-your-turn' style fails to foster the nimble thinking, collaboration and risk-taking newspapers today need."

– www.newsimproved.org

Strengthening your staff







"How can I help?" is the way Poynter Institute's Chip Scanlon says he approaches reporters. It's a style that's informed by the institute's particular understanding of coaching.

The idea is, as Scanlon says, that "a story's problems as well as the means to fix them lie within the person reporting and writing the piece". A coach's role is not to substitute the player, but to strengthen him or her.

Coaching in this sense is not instead of editing, nor is it a synonym for mentoring – it's a tool to be used alongside these activities. The point about the Poynter view of coaching is that it tries to minimise an editor having to fix (that is, "edit") content, after the event. It means empowering staff up front to reduce the amount of editing later in the process.

The empowerment involved is different from mentoring, where experience is passed on through advice and demonstration about what to do. While editing and mentoring give direction and answers, coaching in the Poynter sense works through questions – and specifically, open-ended ones.

The editor-as-coach asks, doesn't tell. It's up to the reporter to think up a creative answer. The trick in coaching is to hold back your comments, criticisms or suggestions. It's hard to do, but also high in long-term yields.

The process

The Poynter philosophy is to break down journalism into component stages of a process, and to encourage coaching at each stage:

1. Story idea stage
2. Reporting (news gathering)
3. Organising (of the gathered information)
4. Drafting the story
5. Polishing the story

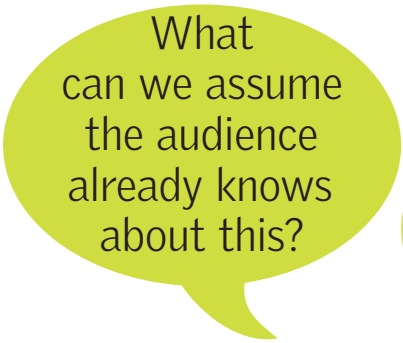
The basic gist is that the product (the writing, the video, etc) is weakened or strengthened by the prior process that has gone into it. Thus, if people are weak at the front end of the process, this will produce problems at the end.

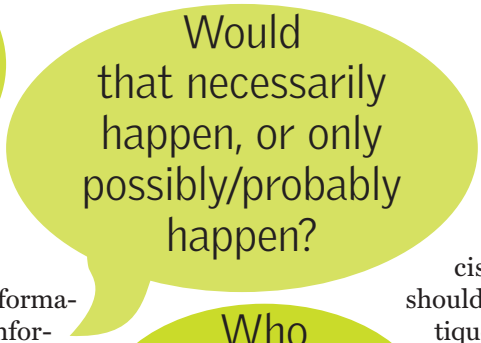
For instance, if there are problems in drafting a story, it is likely that the journalist did not organise information beforehand in a way that could highlight the good stuff and let a structure emerge.

If a reporter has trouble organising, then maybe she or he didn't get the information collection right. And if the person is struggling in getting the information, or has too much information, it could very well be that the idea wasn't properly thrashed out at the beginning.

For Chip Scanlon, editors can add value by coaching, by asking questions at each of these stages. These would be questions that:

1. Help the reporter brainstorm and clarify focus (ideas stage).
2. Encourage the reporter to think through the range of sources of information (news-gathering stage).
3. Assist in identifying structure and



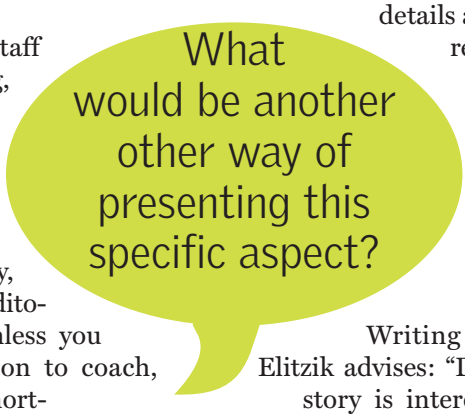


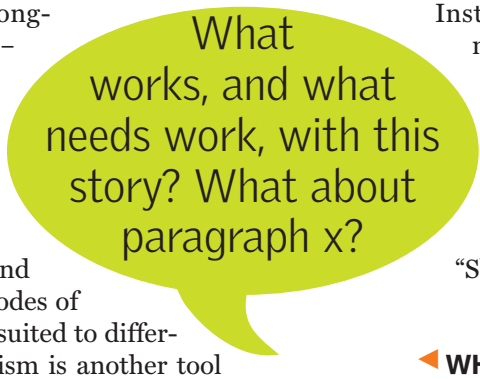
significance within the information gathered (ordering information stage).

4. Prompt thinking about style, voice, order (drafting stage).
5. Get the reporter to think about assumptions, audience, general presentation (revision stage).

Development

If you and your senior staff aren't frequently coaching, while editing and mentoring, you're missing a major developmental activity. It's an invaluable technique that you can consciously, and flexibly, include in your toolkit of editorial management. But unless you make a deliberate decision to coach, you'll find you only use short-term editing and long-term mentoring – firing on two, instead of three, pistons.





Criticism vs critique

Coaching, editing and mentoring are all modes of relating to staff and suited to different moments. Criticism is another tool you can wield.

"On those occasions when an editor sat down with me to critique my stories, I invariably walked away dispirited ..." These are the words of Chip Scanlon, and they reflect the way that criticism too often focuses on the problems, and on too many of them in one go. Too often it is also a one-way discussion where an editor simply doles out blame.

Instead of destructive or defence-eliciting criticism, editors should consider critique instead. This encompasses:

- Criticism where the foundations and criteria are explained.
- Evaluations that give details and make specific references, and are not generalised.
- Judgements that avoid pure subjectivity.
- Comments that stimulate thinking about alternatives.

Writing teacher Paul Elitzik advises: "Don't say that the story is interesting or boring. Instead, describe what makes it interesting or boring." He says you need to ensure that the person you are addressing knows why you came to your conclusion: "Show, don't tell."

– Guy Berger

WHAT TO ASK: Take note of the crackerjack coaching questions listed in the speech bubbles!

(Final section elaborated and adapted from Notes on how to critique a story, at www.artic.edu/%7Epelitz/classes/1004/1004resources/critiquing.html).

MANAGEMENT STYLE

Concentrate on strengths

Managers have to balance a concern with people and a concern with production. Good management tries to keep them in tandem.

To be a proactive manager, avoid getting into a situation where concern with one side begins to happen at the expense of the other. However, it's logical that the people side is critical to the production side, and you neglect this at your peril.

Strengths management

You can't design every job to fit the talents and passions of the person who occupies it, but that doesn't mean that tweaking shouldn't be done.

Management guru Marcus Buckingham makes a strong case for this logic. His principle is: play to a person's strengths.

This way of thinking comes out of a huge Gallup poll analysis which found that the most effective managers don't waste time trying to fix individual weaknesses. Instead they focus on people's strengths and talent. This means identifying the core strengths and mission-critical areas of work for a company – and then matching these with the relevant strengths of individual employees.

In practice, this translates into a work environment where employees can answer positively to:

- Do I know what is expected of me?
- Do I have the materials and equipment I need to do my work right?
- At work, do I have the opportunity to do what I do best every day?

Buckingham recommends all managers ask employees: "What's the best praise you ever received and what made it so good?" Then, he says, act on that knowledge by thinking about "casting": finding roles for the individual that tap into this.

Many believe a person should fix their flaws; in reality it's hard to change many of these. And stressing weaknesses can kill motivation, while focusing on what works well can underline success. Hence the sense in emphasising the cultivation of strengths, not on fixing weaknesses.

Finding fits

Another level of this modus operandi is to spend time with your best people, giving them constant feedback and recognition. Where there are weaknesses, develop support systems or line up complementary colleagues. The challenge is to accommodate each person in a way that best uses their strengths.

The same applies to editors themselves. Using Buckingham's principles, you should lean towards those activities which invigorate you and produce results – i.e. your own strengths. By spending too much time trying to work on your weaknesses yourself, you do not fully exploit these strengths.

The ideal should be that each employee, including yourself, should be able to say that a large part of the job is done working to your strengths.

Success

According to Buckingham: "If you look at the really successful people out there, they have managed to push their weakening activities away, and have achieved this by getting people on side."

This is valuable advice, because it's hard for any editor to be both a super-manager and a top-rate leader.

You are supposed to make good decisions, provide excellent communication, and oversee quality systems and processes. Inspiration, vision, courage and compassion are expected. You have to teach, resolve problems, sound smart and pay attention to people.

If – as is likely – you don't have all these qualities, count on those strengths you do have: which are, presumably, why you got the job.

Develop them further – and find other people whose talents and tastes predispose them to working in the areas where you're not productive.

– Guy Berger

(drawn in part from Leadership: It may never matter more, by the ASNE Leadership Committee; and www.asne.org/kiosk/editor/01.jan-feb/buckner1.htm)

Planning your content to alleviate the chaos

Chris Whitfield

Editor of *Cape Argus*, former editor of *Cape Times*

The random nature of news is obviously a blessing to newspapers and the media generally: the news that makes the biggest impact is almost inevitably that which is unpredictable.

But I sometimes wonder if the chaos out there is not reflected in our newsrooms and newspapers. A glance at some of our publications might suggest a random enough approach to news gathering, selection and display.

Surely this does not serve readers, who are mostly starved of time and generally turn to newspapers for concise and easily digested information on events of the day that either concern them or may be of interest?

Anyway, it was my conviction that readers seek an ordered newspaper – one in which they would routinely know where to turn for, say, local news or international news or opinion or whatever – and I felt this would be best achieved by an ordered news process.

When I was appointed editor of the *Cape Times* in 2001, I was delighted to find then-news editor Colin Howell already had a planning system which he called "the boards". This was actually one board, a whiteboard, in the conference room and on which the following day's dummy pages were mapped out. As the day evolved Colin and other department heads would write in their proposed page leads, pictures and so forth.

These would then be discussed and, if necessary, changed both informally and during the day's conferences. This process had the great benefit of gradually getting us thinking as one (more or less, I suppose) on our general approach to news.

We also decided to display pages from previous weeks in the conference room with the daily circulation and the comparative sale of the previous year written boldly on top of each. This obviously gave us an indication of how a particular edition had sold, but more importantly it gave us some insights into readers' likes and dislikes, and some pointers about our journalism.

The mention of HIV/Aids in a front page lead headline would, for example, knock our sale (generally by about 1 500 out of an average of 50 000). This suggested a weariness among readers about the subject and we set out to find different ways to cover a hugely important story (personalising it seemed to help).

We found Capetonians were particularly proud of their city and stories about significant investment or even increased tourism would boost sales. On the other hand the mention of some of our more tawdry politicians – particularly the variety unique to the Western Cape – in front page headlines would hit sales, which presumably contained a different and broader message.

There were many other insights, some of which would come as no surprise to experienced news people but some that were quite startling.

Our photographers were delighted to get confirmation of their long-held view that pictures can sell newspapers. On one quiet news day, aerial photographs of shadowy great white sharks in the water just off the backline at Muizenburg

increased sales by several thousand copies.

Colin and his colleagues in the newsroom then began extracting copies of front pages and grouping those that had sold and those that had not, on different walls.

This suggested to us that certain displays – for example a packaged page one lead and picture – did indeed sell better than others. Headlines that ran above unrelated photographs in a dogleg seemed to turn readers off.

Some of our better posters were put on display (some just for general amusement, but also as a reminder of how they can effectively market the paper).

One objective was the grubby business imperative (increased sales, increased revenue and so forth), but the open process – reporters held their conferences in the room and all staff were invited into any conference they wished to attend – seemed to generate a broader understanding and "buy-in" from staff.

They obviously drew their own conclusions from the evidence around them and came up with their own suggestions, helping to at least suggest a collective approach to a process traditionally seen as the preserve of a select few.

Results

I think the fact that we were able to grow circulation on the *Cape Times* for many years – with those numbers boldly displayed in the conference room – helped to boost morale. When numbers dipped it served to remind staff that we needed to work together.

There were a few negative lessons, not least being that you can do too much planning. Editors could become so attached to their ideas that breaking news was occasionally in danger of being relegated to secondary importance.

I also found on moving to the *Cape Argus*, with its complicated afternoon newspaper deadlines, that a formal planning process tended to be pushed too early into the production cycle and could stifle spontaneity. The culture of the newspaper is also quite different, so we took that into account when evolving its particular planning process.

Managing a paper

Henry Jeffreys

Editor of *Die Burger*

When I joined *Die Burger* as acting editor for a three-month period, I went around the newsroom chatting to the senior staff who make up the publication's editorial board.

One of my colleagues looked me in the eye and boldly said: "I don't care if the editor is pink, yellow or orange, as long as he (sic) knows what he's doing!" I wondered loudly whether he'd made that statement to any of my predecessors, who happened to all be white males, on their appointments.

To understand the significance of this little story, one has to understand *Die Burger* and why the title of this piece is important.

Die Burger is an Afrikaans daily newspaper first published in 1915; the first publication of Naspers, the leading media company in Africa with aspirations to this status in the developing world.

Die Burger was published at first to promote and support the causes of Afrikaner nationalism, including the rise of the National Party and eventually apartheid. All of this has changed in the past decade or so.

Now *Die Burger*, like many other SA newspapers, has no choice but to focus on the larger society and particularly the broader Afrikaans-speaking community. Perhaps more than any other paper (*Rapport* comes close), it serves a truly diverse Afrikaans-speaking community: one part Afrikaner white and the other coloured black.

In days gone by *Die Burger* (as did most other mainstream newspapers at the time) published so-called "*Ekstra*" (extra) editions aimed at the coloured

HOW I SEE IT

with fractured audiences

readership. At its height, *Die Burger Ekstra* sold more than 30 000 copies daily. This was always a politically expedient and awkward way of serving what was clearly a significant readership.

The *Ekstra*s were buried with South Africa's undesirable past and *Die Burger* was confronted with the new challenge of serving the full Afrikaans-speaking community in one newspaper.

The paper's readership today consists roughly of 50% white and 50% coloured. It is bought by roughly 47% white and 43% coloured readers. There is increased coloured readership following the demise of the *Ekstra*.

How does one edit such an animal? Especially if you are at the same time the first coloured editor of a publication inspired by Afrikaner nationalism?

- **First,** you steer clear of party political allegiances and rather judge politics and politicians on the merit or demerit of their actions, against the backdrop of the Constitution (the new ideology?) and what it requires of the high and mighty.
- **Second,** agree with the question my colleague posed right at the beginning of my editorship (I was appointed editor two months after the acting editor stint). You demonstrate that you know what you're doing (even if you're black) and more.
- **Third,** stress the point that journalism and the people come first. Content will be driven by the story and not necessarily by issues of race.
- **Fourth,** gather a team of journalists more or less representative of the demographics of the communities served, but not at the expense of quality. In an environment where skills are in short supply this is difficult but, as we have demonstrated, not impossible. The more representative your staff, the more interesting the journalistic perspective and end-product.

It was therefore important to get the journalists to understand their first priority was the story. Much work had in fact been done long before my arrival and I just had to push the idea a bit more firmly.

The upside was that the representation of issues and experiences of all communities in the Western and Eastern Cape increased dramatically. The downside was that for some white readers this was at first uncomfortable: we no doubt lost some as a result. We are, however, proud that the core readership seems to appreciate the necessity of the changes and value the insights this brings about the lives of fellow South Africans.

Research indicates our core readers – largely the middle classes – are increasingly similar in how they view and experience life. The editorial mix is designed to speak to them through these similarities. Of course there are differences, but these can generate rich pickings for interesting and insightful journalism.

One of the ways we deal with stories which speak to the reader in his or her local environment is through geographic zoning. Typically we produce five editions a day and more often than not each leads with a different, locally relevant story up front, with more local stories in the main body.

All of this is done within the framework of a comprehensive code of ethics which every journalist joining *Die Burger* must sign and adhere to.

Language remains a challenge. Long-time readers of *Die Burger* were brought up with a strict, standardised form of Afrikaans and many would like this to remain. But Afrikaans has in its own way been liberated and this shows in the way the language is spoken and written across the spectrum of speakers and writers. We are increasingly becoming less tight in language use. A language committee oversees this: not to keep out, but to add to and enrich the vocabulary.

TAKE A SNAPSHOT MEASUREMENT

How male/female are you?

It is generally accepted that if you want women to read your newspaper, or listen to or watch your broadcasts, they must also be represented there. Not as tokens or stereotypes, or to pretty up your pages ... they do not want to be alienated by such treatment. As full participants, warts and all.

The old approach was to have special sections or shows aimed primarily at women – often content that would be seen as trivial by men, who were catered for by "serious" stuff.

This became politically incorrect near the end of the last century. It also often failed to increase audience or attract women-oriented advertising. Another approach was to aim special content at the "high heels, equal paycheck" market.

The principle of reflecting in your media the kind of people you want to consume it was an issue many "white" media had to tackle around the start of the 1990s: previously, for example, mainstream newspapers carried predominantly white faces, voices and bylines (usually men). With the start of democracy, it became glaringly obvious that not only was this horribly skewed, it would also alienate black people and limit the audience in the long term ... and as South Africa changed, so did the faces and voices in papers and on air (mostly to those of black men).

But it is not just an issue of quantity, it is also one of quality.

Filling your media with young models draped over cars, or female social workers speaking on behalf of abused women, will still alienate a female audience. They want to see and hear women like themselves, women who they aspire to be like

Snapshot method

A. First compare quantity:

ITEM	DETAIL	WOMEN	MEN
How many **photographs** in	news pages		
	opinion pages		
	sports pages		
How many **stories about**, in	news pages		
	opinion pages		
	sports pages		
How many **individuals quoted** in	news pages		
	opinion pages		
	sports pages		
How many **bylines/picture credits** in	news pages		
	opinion pages		
	sports pages		
TOTAL	**All pages**		

in terms of their success in the wider world and women who have more difficult lives but speak for themselves. The whole range. And they want to hear from male social workers.

There are sophisticated ways of surveying how women are responding to your media, which will give you detailed analysis.

But if you are unsure whether you have a problem or not, first take a quick snapshot.

The example here is a simplified one for a newspaper, which you might do for five or ten editions to get a good picture, but it can easily be made more complex or adapted for other media.

Besides the marketing importance, there is the constitutional/legal argument: any sex discrimination by media means that women are not fairly shown as productive and valued – and this has the wider impact of media on society.

How to create a gender balance in your media is a strategy issue: a complex piece of work that requires both a look at the audience you are aiming at and what sort of content changes it would require. You also need all your staff to understand the issues and agree to tackle them.

But taking a snapshot can be a start. The method can also be adapted to look at other issues: race and age, for example.

Measuring things starts to change them. But it is just a start.

Taking deliberate steps to recall the issue at each news conference makes the change actually happen in the long term. Adding a gender-relevance table to your news diary template helps – but leadership is needed to ensure that people don't skip it.

– Elizabeth Barratt

USEFUL TOOL

B. Then look at the "quality" of the women who are in the paper:

ITEM	Victims	Criminals	Politicians	Business people	In "caring professions"	Celebrities	Sports	Community leaders	Community members/ workers
Photographs									
Stories about									
Quoted									
Bylines*									
TOTAL									

*(for your staff bylines, note what kind of story they are writing)

Lessons from tackling tik

By Ingo Capraro
Editor of *Son*

To be successful, a campaign must be well managed and closely monitored – with various controls in place to keep you on track.

Son has been campaigning against the use of tik in the Western Cape, which is so much worse than any drug that came before. Worse than dagga or mandrax because it is easy to make, cheap and available everywhere. Girls even want to use it, under the impression it will help them stay slim. And the social consequence is that people will do anything to get it, to feed their addiction: in one case a house was taken apart to sell bricks to buy tik.

When deciding on whether to have a campaign, ask why you are thinking of doing this. What do you want to achieve? It may be partly altruistic. *Son* is a community paper, involved in the communities that are hard hit by tik, and this fits in with its ethical code of being for the underdog and the distressed. Also, more than half its readers are women, who bear the brunt of this. But you also hope a campaign will increase your circulation.

Then decide what your concrete aims are. In this case, we wanted to warn our readers and the community about the dire consequences of tik.

Next, you need to convince your staff. Everyone must buy in: news editor, reporters, photographers, subs, promotions. Sell the idea to them, explain what you are going to do, discuss how to approach these stories in an ethical way. For this you need specific and written guidelines for content, a 10 to 12-point briefing for the journalists. For example, we decided never to mention to readers that tik makes you horny.

The next stage is to decide how to brand the campaign – you need a slogan or motto, and a logo. We chose "Oorlog teen tik" ("War against tik").

Then decide how long you will do the campaign, when it will start and other timelines.

Once the details and direction are ironed out, it is time to launch. Announce your campaign to your readers – on the front page, with further detailed information inside – and do a widespread poster campaign.

Involve experts – develop partners – to get knowledge as well as content. We contacted rehabilitation counsellors and all the others who work with addiction. From one we got a shocking scan which showed lesions on the brain from tik.

During the campaign, keep in mind the dangers of involving certain people and groups. Do not let the experts or anyone else hijack your campaign or use it to push their own line. You also cannot compromise the paper as a business.

Then involve the community. With your logo, invite them to phone in or

HANDY HINT

Campaign checklist

1. What you want to achieve
2. Concrete aims
3. Full staff buy-in
4. Written guidelines
5. Branding: slogan and logo
6. Timelines
7. Launch, including poster campaign
8. Partners
9. Dangers
10. Community
11. Big stories
12. Keep up momentum
13. Measure success
14. Publish campaign successes

EDITORIAL CAMPAIGNS

send an SMS with their stories and tipoffs. We had people from the community coming to ask how they could help, and so we backed a march which was done under our banner ... and carried the photo on the front page.

Hit the big stories – this is a critical part of the campaign, to have stories with impact. For example, we had a photo of Goodwood prison on the front page, with the headline "Tik jail".

Once you have the momentum, do not lose the initiative. At news conference every day I ask what the latest is on the tik front. Keep the issue top of mind for all staff. Lots of crime stories are linked to tik, so we use that angle and put the logo there.

Finally, as you go along, measure your success: circulation gains, SMSes, letters and phone calls received. Tell your staff. Even better, print the success stories from your campaign: in our case, about those who give up tik.

DEFINITION

Civic, public or community journalism

The role of a journalist is usually seen as that of a detached bystander who does not act in the drama of public life.

There is an alternative perspective – though some argue it destroys the independence and analytical distance of the media from its subjects.

This approach recognises that media often take a stand on issues – and accordingly positions itself to do this more consistently and overtly.

The terms "civic", "public" or "community" journalism, bandied about in the United States, have similar enough meanings that they can be used interchangeably. They are used to describe journalism that contributes directly to community problem-solving at a local level.

This journalism does not try to solve problems itself, but engages with and supports the efforts of citizens to solve problems and to play their democratic role in the community. It may involve creating public forums where citizens can discuss a particular problem, calling on citizens to participate, and/or providing information which helps them in this dialogue.

– Elizabeth Barratt

Finding the ethical high road

Franz Krüger

Senior lecturer at Wits University's journalism department, author of a book on ethics in SA journalism

Among the battery of high-tech skills and tools the modern editorial leader needs, there is a rather quaint, old-fashioned item: a compass.

It's a moral compass, to be precise. There is sometimes a temptation to see it as an archaic item, of little use in today's increasingly complex media world. What did the drafters of our codes know of modern marketing or the internet, after all?

In fact, though, a compass becomes more important, not less, as we venture further and further into uncharted terrain. It may become harder and harder to read against the unfamiliar landmarks, but that's no reason to throw it away.

It may be useful to remind ourselves of the basic point of ethics: by tying us in to a set of values we share with our audiences, they help us maintain credibility. So even if they lead us to spike a juicy story from time to time, they are in our long-term interests by maintaining the trust of our readers, viewers and listeners.

The core principles of truthtelling, independence, minimising harm and accountability resonate with journalists and audiences as much as they ever did. People may find many – too many – examples of journalists falling short of the ideal, but everyone agrees that the ideals are worth aiming for.

But ethics are not about naïve idealism, they are about hard practice. Applying them is difficult. Does the principle of accuracy require us to correct a story on a website invisibly or in a way that shows it has been done? How do we maintain independence in the face of ever more inventive techniques by marketers seeking to blur the line between advertising and editorial?

It often starts with a small voice, easy to overlook in the daily clamour. Often it says merely: this feels a little uncomfortable. I'm not sure I'd like my audience to know about it.

Editors need to develop a willingness to listen to that little voice.

Once alerted, editors need a set of hard analytical skills to resolve an ethical issue. These can be developed through training and practice. Tools like the Ethics Roadmap, reproduced here, can help think you through an issue.

Ethical decision-making needs to be deliberate and careful, and it benefits from discussion. Even the most junior member of staff may have useful insights. In South Africa, particularly, we should make use of the range of different per-

READINGS

Want to know more?

- Johan Retief. 2002. *Media ethics: a guide to responsible journalism*. Cape Town: OUP
- Franz Krüger. 2004. *Black, white and grey: ethics in SA journalism*. Cape Town: Double Storey
- www.presscouncil.org.za is the website of the SA Press Council. It includes the SA Press Code, rulings by the Press Ombudsman and other material.
- www.bccsa.co.za is the website of the Broadcasting Complaints Commission of SA. It contains the broadcasting code, rulings and other material.
- www.journalism.co.za/ethics contains a collection of codes, case studies and other material.
- www.sanef.org.za has a section on ethics codes.

AS I SEE IT

spectives and views in our newsrooms.

Time, as always, is no friend. Just as many poor headlines are written because of deadline pressure, so poor ethical calls are made when there is not enough time to think and talk. Good editorial leaders develop the ability to pick up problems early enough to allow some time to consider them, and know when it is better to hold a story for further consideration, even at the risk of being scooped.

Ultimately, the most important way for an editor to build ethical practice is by setting a tone that takes these issues seriously. It means ensuring that ethical concerns are always part of the editorial discussion, not a separate issue that is only dealt with if completely unavoidable.

It also involves a willingness to admit mistakes, which good leaders know is a sign of strength, not weakness. Only the insecure are never wrong.

You may feel the old compass is no longer up to it. By all means trade it in for a GPS device – it may be fancier, but it's still a compass at heart. What is important is that you continue to look for the ethical high road.

USE THIS TOOL

Ethics Roadmap: 3 steps to resolve a dilemma

Note: This roadmap can be used to work through a particular issue. It is based on a formula developed by US ethicist Louis Day, plus approaches used by the American Society of Newspaper Editors and the Poynter Institute as well as other sources. Remember that discussion with colleagues will improve your decisions, particularly if those colleagues have different backgrounds to your own.

Step 1: Define the issue

- What are the facts of the case?
- What is the question?

Step 2: Think through the issue:

- Why am I doing this story? What is the public interest?
- Who is affected and how? What would they want? Are those desires legitimate? (Possible stakeholders include sources, the subject of the story, their families, the news organisation.)
- Which principles are involved? Which of them clash? (Tick the relevant ones, adding your own if necessary, and explain why.)
  - ☐ Accuracy
  - ☐ Fairness
  - ☐ Independence
  - ☐ Duty to inform the public
  - ☐ Minimising harm
  - ☐ Avoiding unnecessary offence
  - ☐ Respecting privacy
  - ☐ Honesty in relating to the source
  - ☐ Honouring a promise
  - ☐ Avoiding deception
  - ☐ Is race or gender a factor? How?
  - ☐ Which guidelines and precedents are relevant?
- What are the alternative courses of action? Are there ways I can handle the situation that satisfy various conflicting interests or principles? What advantages and disadvantages are there in each case?

Option 1: .....
Option 2: .....
Option 3: .....
(Add more if necessary)

Step 3: Decide

- The best option is: .....
- How will I defend my decision to colleagues, the different stakeholders and to my audience?

– From: Black, white and grey: ethics in SA journalism, by Franz Krüger

Africa news from stringers

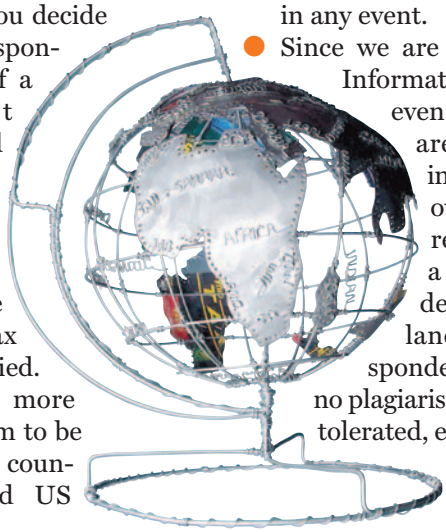
Liesl Louw
Former Africa editor of Media 24

When planning coverage of the rest of Africa, there are two choices: either rely on wires or foreign journalists, or recruit your own local correspondents.

Working with local freelance journalists on the continent can be satisfying, and it is certainly a learning experience.

However there are many pitfalls.

- Finding credible reporters is the most important first step. It is not as difficult as one might imagine since the numerous courses and workshops throughout South Africa (eg IAJ, Highway Africa) provide an excellent source of local journalists across the continent. The rest is word of mouth – it is amazing how fast the message travels that a news organisation is looking for a freelancer in Zambia, Ghana, Uganda or wherever!
- Payments are usually decided by you or your editor. Just make very sure correspondents are aware of bank charges if you decide they should be responsible for these. If a correspondent prefers to be paid in a bank account here (some Zimbabweans might), make sure they realise South African tax will have to be levied. It is actually far more beneficial for them to be paid in their own countries, at a fixed US dollar rate.
- Though most journalists work in English, if you need your comprehensive coverage of the continent to include places like the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Cameroon or Côte d'Ivoire, the Africa editor will have to be able to read French or employ a translator.
- Having established a network of correspondents, the biggest job is to guide them as to the content you require: the topic and how it should be written. Local journalists often believe agency-type writing is the international standard and will inundate you with short, blank news pieces. They overlook story ideas like the new trend for short skirts in Dakar, the market women protesting in Kampala or the nightlife in Lagos adapting to the power cuts ... and instead give you features based on news releases from Unicef or the World Food programme.
- Since you're not there, it is extremely difficult to find those colourful stories and suggest them. So the editor needs to do a lot of reading – including popular magazines on Africa and websites. If not, your correspondents will end up giving you what you can get from the wires in any event.
- Since we are all working on the Information Highway – and even more so those who are connected at an internet café with little other infrastructure to rely on – plagiarism is a major issue when dealing with freelancers. Warn correspondents beforehand that no plagiarism in any form will be tolerated, explain in detail what this means and then be vigilant.



HOW WE DO IT

Using news research strategically

Izak Minnaar
Head: SABC news research

Depending on the news organisation you work for, the concept of "news research" may differ vastly.

In some newsrooms this activity is associated with being able to search the paper (hard copy) and digital archives of the publication as well as other news clippings; or in a broadcast environment the ability to access archived raw and packaged video and audio material and scripts.

But in other media organisations news research is an integral part of the content planning and news production process – and a research editor plays a key role in the editorial information management process. A news research unit is typically tasked with:

- Gathering information on future events and emerging news themes to help editors make informed coverage planning decisions.
- Playing an active part in the news assignment process and working closely with editors, reporters and producers to gather material for stories – in a desk and/or field research capacity.
- Fact-checking (including spelling of names, titles and designations!) for subbing and production desks.
- Compiling profiles, timelines, fact sheets, statistics, backgrounders and info graphics for daily publication or broadcast purposes.
- Tracking developments on running stories, often in the form of a news clippings database; adding stories to be followed up to a future events diary.
- Compiling info packs and background research docs for use by reporters, producers and presenters on big or complicated stories.
- Identifying experts and analysts to broaden the range of voices.
- Acquiring databases with useful information for the newsroom and assisting with interpretation of the data and facilitating access to these and other electronic resources.
- Publishing the output on a news intranet, to be the newsroom's first port of call for research resources.

The editor can optimise the strategic role of a news research unit in the media organisation by ensuring:

Firstly, that the unit has the capacity – and editorial space – to be proactive by focusing a substantial part of its work on compiling a future events diary, which then determines to a large extent its research priorities. This means the unit can have the information ready by the time assignment and desk editors need it for daily news planning and production. Reactive work should as far as possible be limited to research on breaking stories.

Secondly, by having beat specialisation in the research unit and promoting close co-operation between beat researchers and the relevant desks, the organisation develops in-depth expertise and resources, enhancing its ability to build and retain institutional memory in any number of chosen fields.

Thirdly, by investing in the continuous development of the news intranet as the repository of all material produced by the research unit, over time it will become a rich editorial resource.

Finally, since the nature of the work compels news researchers to become super online searchers, this expertise can be used to spread computer-aided research skills in the newsroom.

These two attributes – an institutional research capacity and reporters whose work is supported by excellent research skills – are crucial contributors to content quality.

Setting online deadlines

Rachel Stewart
Editor: online news, TelkomMedia

News on the web is accessible all the time by anyone online. When and how often to update the site, and what stories go on the home page and for how long, are determined by a number of factors, including:

- From where does your traffic emanate? Is it local or is there a lot of international traffic? Most South Africans online (61%) still only access the internet from work.
- What are your peak traffic times? Be ready with a freshly updated page and fast-moving headlines.
- What is your news flow? Radio may be updated hourly; print's main news flow is towards the evening (with a bit in the morning for on-day editions); TV might have early, midday and evening bulletins or 24-hour news with some looping. If you work with any of these media, take them into account.

For breaking news on the web, run a marquee or ticker tape as soon as your source is corroborated, then put up a short story, and develop it from there.

You need the same checks for accuracy as any media: once it's on the internet it can take on a life of its own. Errors, factual and grammatical, are spotted and made known to you fast and vociferously!

Decide whether the home page should have the newest stories, whatever they are, with the page refreshing dynamically, or if it should carry the top stories of the day, updated as often as possible. Does your target audience want fast updates or in-depth news?

And should you scoop your partner platforms? If the website is linked to a daily newspaper, let alone a weekly, no. In addition to possibly reducing sales, if the story is on the website the competition can get it. The internet could play a teaser role, but you will have to get web-specific copy, good enough to retain eyeballs, in the interim. On the other hand, is your print readership online? Only about 10% of South Africans are. Find out and that will influence your decision.

If the website is linked to radio news, you can compete (internet can be updated faster than radio, unless radio programming is broken into) and co-operate (faster news flow).

With TV bulletins or special current affairs shows, you could launch the video post-broadcast or simultaneously, but use the script a bit earlier. Even better, develop the story further in multimedia, using the depth and breadth available for content on the internet.

MY EXPERIENCE

Cartoons and cartoonists

Jonathan Shapiro
Cartoonist Zapiro

Cartoons can cover a huge range of issues. Almost anything that is gripping the public mind can be a topic, especially since cartoons often marry two completely disparate issues to say something with a twist. For the leader page, political issues are obviously appropriate and are the most often covered.

Cartoonists can be seen as visual columnists who often show a clear and independent point of view. Advocacy in cartoons can be controversial, when for example attacking religious dogma relating to sex.

Controversy generates debate and letters to the editor. Editors I've worked with have mostly seen this as good for the paper though some are more cautious, being reluctant to offend readers.

I feel that while rude, risqué or extremely hard-hitting cartoons are bound to offend some readers, this is a risk worth taking. Many media analysts argue that the occasional causing of offence is part of the role of cartoons, which are by tradition irreverent. Editors can use the legitimate disclaimer that the cartoonist's views do not necessarily represent the views of the newspaper.

Most cartoonists prefer being given free rein, or close to it. Even rather hands-off editors can suggest a little discretion in a rude cartoon or perhaps the use of a different word in the text. It's better to do this during the preliminary stage of the cartoon than to censor the final drawing. But the editor does have the final say.

The relationship between the editor and the cartoonist, and whether the editor prefers the cartoons to reflect the paper's editorial positions, will determine how much guidance an editor gives a cartoonist.

Editors these days seem less inclined than in earlier years to hold the cartoonist to the paper's editorial stance. But even cartoonists who have free rein often enjoy discussing issues and angles.

I prefer an editor not to be prescriptive about which subjects to cover, as I enjoy using a lateral-thinking approach which sometimes brings unexpected results. But some cartoonists are happy to be provided with subject matter and direction.

Some editors prefer cartoonists to submit a rough idea or ideas, and the rough stage is the best time for an editor's advice.

Cartoonists tend to be reclusive ... these days even more so, in that few cartoonists still work in the newsroom.

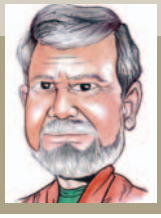
Cartoonists certainly benefit from feedback after publication on how their work has been received at the paper and by readers, especially if some readers' views didn't make it to the letters page.

To maintain a strong relationship with a cartoonist, especially one who works outside the newsroom, an editor should prioritise being available by phone or e-mail where possible. And because of other pressures on the editor, it's best to assign another senior staffer as back-up.

If, on legal advice, an editor wants to make a change to a cartoon to avoid a defamation or libel suit, the cartoonist should be kept in the loop. Often a short conversation can lead to a compromise that won't deflate the cartoon.

Cartoonists should also be kept in mind by other staff, and not be informed at the last minute of unusually early deadlines or other changes to routine.

The truth behind writing leaders



Gavin Stewart

Writer and former editor of the *Daily Dispatch*

A leader is an argument and a story. The structure of an argument and any other kind of story is much the same.

Both begin with a situation, a problem arises, one or more solutions present themselves, these are evaluated and (only in a story) acted upon.

It goes like this:

Situation □ Problem □ Solution □ Evaluation (□ Action).

But we don't have to tell the story in that order. We can start with any of the parts and arrange the others in whatever way we like. Most leaders begin with the problem then describe the situation from which it arose. Sometimes you will want to start with the solution, then discuss the problem.

The critical parts are a hook at the beginning to keep the reader reading – and a punch at the end to make the effort worth the time.

Some days you will wake up with no

Issues with blogs and bloggers

Riaan Wolmarans

Editor of *Mail & Guardian Online*

Free speech is far from simple. This is what the *Mail & Guardian Online*'s invitation-only Thought Leader blogging platform has taught me.

When we launched Thought Leader in mid-2007, we had already run a free-for-all online discussion forum service for several years.

Knowing some of the legal and ethical problems that had resulted from unmoderated comments posted on those forums, we realised that Thought Leader would have to be completely moderated. We wanted it to be a website with insightful and stimulating debate, not just mudslinging and insults.

Since then, managing our bloggers has turned out to be the easy part. In almost a year, we turned away only a handful of blog entries: two for straying from heavy criticism into defamation, and the rest for other reasons.

It's also been easy to convince informed people across society to take part, even for free – journalists, activists and other writers have recognised the value of a blog that is well presented and published under a trustworthy brand like that of the *M&G Online*.

However comment moderation is, in short, a headache.

An example: many of our blogs raise issues of racism, and there is a small group of outspoken "racists" commenting there.

Often they do so in a restrained, well-reasoned manner, but when their comments become too blatantly racist, in our view, we don't approve them – and then this group accuses us of censorship.

On the other hand, some more sensitive contributors and readers have said we should not allow *any* comment by

AS I SEE IT

opinions. No strong feelings about the world. Nothing new at all.

Reading the newspapers might not help, nor listening to the radio. You will go through all the headlines, hear them repeated on the hour, listen to the same idiots phoning the talk-show hosts and consider all the topics about which you might raise a thought ... and realise you have dealt with them before.

But the leader space has to be filled. If you're really unlucky, two or three leader spaces have to be filled. So you need a notebook to jot down any idea, no matter how strange, which might ever be turned into a leader.

Talking to people and listening to what is worrying them also helps.

The trick is to start writing – the ideas will come as the words flow across the screen. Don't stop until you have the number of words you need for the space you have to fill. Editing is many times easier than creating.

Few leader writers have not, in desperation, paraphrased a leader from another newspaper, or argued with it.

There are none who have not abandoned one idea as a better idea crept out from under it.

By deadline time the task will be accomplished. It always is.

HOW WE DO IT

people like these.

We have posted extensive comment guidelines saying, among other things, that racist comments or comments that could be interpreted as such won't be accepted. Such guidelines are crucial as they cover our moderation decisions on problematic comments.

But we are still forced to evaluate each and every comment – is it extreme but acceptable, or does it go too far? (This is apart from what are clearly unacceptable comments containing hate speech, defamation and so forth.)

This cumbersome but necessary task also takes up a sizeable chunk of the work day of our online editorial team, who have had to brush up on media law regarding defamation and hate speech.

The *New York Times* has the luxury of full-time comment editors. In South African online newsrooms, this remains on the wish list – for now.

"We cannot make good news out of bad practice."

– Edward R. Murrow, pioneering US radio and TV reporter

Usefulness of guidelines

Flak hit Snuki Zikalala in 2006 over his black-listing of several sources from appearing on SABC programmes. As SABC news chief, he had told various staffers, at various times, for various reasons, not to use various experts.

There was no actual "list" of names or even any formalised system, according to the Sisulu Commission which inquired into the matter.

What did emerge, instead, was a pattern of arbitrary action. The blacklisting arose from diverse remarks by Zikalala, some of which were construed as general rules even when not intended as such.

The reasons Zikalala gave the commission for excluding people ranged from a commentator who had commented without having first-hand information, another who had once messed up journalistically, and a third who had made remarks against the "national interest" (which SABC is legislatively required to promote).

As other editors observed, however, in principle every editor has the prerogative to decide whose views get presented and with what authority or status they are credited. The tricky business is over how this is done.

In response to an outcry, Zikalala initiated a formal policy for who counted as an expert. Thus, instead of comments on-the-hop which came across as evidence of erratic and fuzzy micro-management, he saw the value of policy guidelines as a management tool to deal with criteria for who had appropriate commentator status. However, the solution was only half in place.

The belated policy was subsequently declared to be in force. But missing from

Freebie policies or codes

Editors and journalists are often offered presents which have the potential to jeopardise their editorial integrity and independence – so conduct and ethics codes need to tackle this clearly.

If you take a hard line on this, your policy on freebies may be quite short – like this line in the SABC editorial code:

"We shall not accept gifts, favours, free travel, special treatment or privileges, which may compromise our integrity and any such offer shall be disclosed."

Similarly, the City Press code has a policy on gifts and freebies which starts like this: "The basic policy of the City Press is that WE DO NOT ACCEPT ANYTHING FOR FREE. We pay our own way, and we do not accept gifts, freebies, inducements, special offers, tickets, free trips, and so on that are not available to us as ordinary citizens."

However, for most media this is just a start. The policy is spelt out in detail to avoid any misunderstandings.

Here is a guide to what could be covered in such a policy:

1. Overall approach (the policy principles).
2. Gifts – whether all gifts, or just

it was evidence of research into how other public broadcasters identified and presented experts. The policy was also not approved by the board and, more problematically, absent from its genesis was any consultation with the staff – the people who were ultimately supposed to adhere to its guidelines.

In the aftermath, the Sisulu Report was leaked, notwithstanding the SABC board's attempt to keep it confidential. Most of those previously excluded were soon back on SABC programmes and the policy guidelines were not taken further.

What was left, after all this, was an enduring vacuum in clarity over the serious issue of who qualifies to be represented as an expert commentator, and about how the selection of such sources can be elevated above immediate spot judgements or political concerns.

Understanding policy

- Policy can be a systemic way to manage organisations.
- Policies can specify rules, or they may just be guidelines – either way, their status should be clear.
- The overall objective of policy is to create shared expectations and understandings, and to guide standard operating procedures.
- Policy also needs to take account of different interests and interpretations, and include ways to resolve these.
- The Sisulu Report described editorial policy as "a sword and a shield" for editors in public broadcasting.
- Policy need not only contain "do not" parameters; it can also enable. For

MORE INFO

those valued over a certain ceiling, need to be refused or returned, declared or passed on to an editorial pool for annual auctions, prize givings or donations to charity.

3. Complimentary access to events or establishments for the purpose of possible coverage.
4. Free tickets not related to coverage (for example sports events and concerts).
5. CDs, tapes and books for review.
6. Free drinks and meals (hospitality).
7. Car loans and petrol (usually only for motoring journalists).
8. Travel invitations for reviews of holiday destinations.
9. Media flights from governments or corporates.
10. Solicitation of free travel offers (flights and/or accommodation) by an individual.
11. Sponsored conferences.
12. Gifts of stocks and shares.
13. Restaurant reviews.
14. Applicability of the above to freelancers.

The policy is spelt out in detail to avoid any misunderstandings, and to clarify transparency issues such as what should be communicated to an audience with regard to reports emanating from sponsored trips.

– Elizabeth Barratt

instance, a policy on internet use can go further than "no porn" and instead set out principles for advancing digital literacy among staffers (for example, training in how to do advanced internet search).

- Best practice policy draws on basic values and the results of research, and includes the inputs of staffers and sometimes even other stakeholders.
- Best practice should also include a communications programme, and a monitoring and review strategy.
- Too much policy can be a killer, while a margin of chaos can be a generator for creativity. Limit your policy tools to priority areas.

Sample policy topics

These can include training, freebies, confidential briefings, travel, use of company transport, smoking, corrections and apologies, misrepresentation, representation of children, coverage of race, use of graphic photographs.

You can often find examples of other media houses' policies online which can feed into new or enrich existing ones.

You can approach policy in various ways, or mix them:

1 See it as smoothly integrative, ensuring predictability, as a way of developing agreed procedures and avoiding ad hoc decisions.

2 Recognise that a policy also needs to acknowledge interests, especially among the more vocal sectors whose positions will have to be incorporated or negotiated if they are to be convinced and the policy is to be legitimate.

3 Treat policy matters in general as a site of politics and the operation of power, establishing who is in charge. There's often also a dimension that serves as political theatre – with primarily symbolic impact. But don't stop there – without substance, the policy won't go very far.

4 Promote grassroots ownership by encouraging participation in developing policy, not only by being consultative in the formulation of policy but also by being empowering with regard to impact.

5 Rather opt for a patchy and piecemeal policy regime than excessive bureaucracy.

– Guy Berger

CHECKLIST

Designing newsroom policy

A ten-point checklist for effective tools:

1. The policy's rationale should be relevant and clear. It should address:
   - Why this policy, what's the purpose? (for example to create predictability, to be restrictive or to be enabling?)
   - Whose problem/possibility is addressed? (Key do's AND don'ts are included.)
   - Which people are the target of the policy?
2. Has a clear definition of what it covers. For example, what exactly is a "confidential briefing" if you want a policy on this? What is the scope – does the policy on freelancing by staff cover their private time?
3. It is upfront about its genesis.
   - Who made the policy, what interests are incorporated, what are the implications for its legitimacy, who has final decision-making power?
4. The policy recognises inputs.
   - What context and values underpin the policy, and any research or consultation that have contributed to it.
5. It is explicit about its status – is it merely guidelines, or is it a set of rules?
6. It is practical – especially regarding capacity, budget and time issues, and simplicity.
7. It is assessable – does it have some visible indicators?
8. It specifies who communicates it and how.
9. It tells who monitors and assesses implementation.
10. It sets out who is responsible for taking corrective action or policy review.

– Guy Berger

VALUE OF THE MARKET

Weighing up editorial research

Jos Kuper
Marketing, media and socio-political analyst

Who is king: editorial integrity or the market?

The key is that it doesn't have to be either editorial integrity or the market, but rather both/and.

Elements of editorial content or platforms are sacrosanct but listening to the market, being sensitive to its needs, understanding it deeply and responding accordingly, can make an immense difference to the medium's differentiation, circulation and audience success and the degree to which it establishes a close relationship with its market.

Many forms of research can do this, including the somewhat shallow "laundry list" research in which the audience tick off the topics they feel they would enjoy.

Then there is psychographic research, like the FutureFact survey (www.futurefact.co.za) that identifies trends which are shaping different elements of society and the "climate of change" in which the medium is operating.

This type of research highlights the mindsets of the people you are addressing and the likely scenarios for the country in the future, which are essential for locating your medium within an evolving society.

A survey such as Daily Reader Research (modified from O Globo in Brazil) is expensive but pays dividends (see graphic).

It allows for daily sensitivity to the interests of the market, identifies the kind of front page pictures and stories that appeal to readers, finds "space savers" in the stories or features that are of little interest, and helps to make way for those that will have appeal (see graphic below).

Editors need to ensure the researcher provides information in a way that is accessible, useful and actionable.

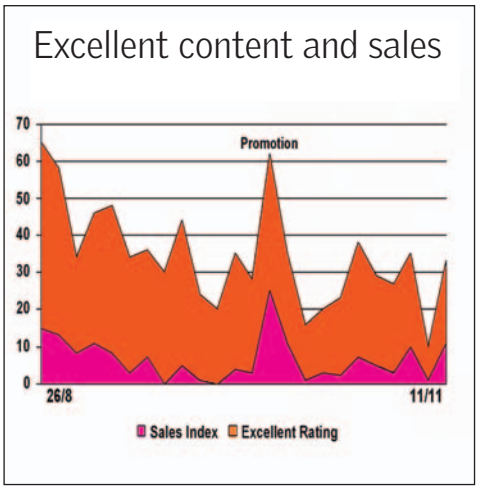
It is incumbent on editorial professionals not to be defensive when the research doesn't confirm their views (prejudices?).

Both the researcher and the editor should be on the same side: identifying content that will make the product more successful and bond more readers, listeners or viewers to it on an ongoing and committed basis.

ACRONYMS

What are these?

ABC = Audit Bureau of Circulations: www.abccr.cz/ifabc/south_africa/south_africa.html
SAARF = South African Advertising Research Foundation: www.saarf.co.za
AMPS = All media and products survey
RAMS = Radio listening: Radio audience measurement survey
TAMS = TV viewing: Television audience measurement survey



Audience measurement: does it have editorial value?

Many print journalists are not aware of the difference between circulation and readership measurements and, for example, talk about 500 000 readers when the reality is a 500 000 circulation and 4,7-million readers.

The former refers to ABC figures which provide the number of magazine or newspaper copies sold, and the latter to Amps, which gives the number of readers as well as a range of other information about them. This would include their demographics, some lifestyle and attitudinal information, and their intermedia patterns.

Print circulation figures cannot tell you who is buying the newspaper or magazine, and they are dependent on "sales variables" such as the season, the weather, or the number of public holidays and school holidays that fall within the circulation period under review.

So what is the value of each from an editorial perspective?

Neither is gospel. Neither is a foolproof measurement. But both undoubtedly have value, provided they are understood correctly.

ABCs come out quarterly these days. Of course there is value in seeing whether your circulation is increasing or decreasing, period on period. Particularly for a new entrant in the market, it is good to monitor the sales over time. For a more mature product it is good to compare like periods, but even then interpretation of the product's performance should take into account the conditions listed above.

You need to be aware that circulation and readership figures do not necessarily show a good relationship. Demographic and other factors such as bulk sales to schools will make a difference to the number and type of readers, and the readers-per-copy figure.

For example, a magazine that has a high readers-per-copy figure may be expensive and the kind of publication that is passed around the office for many to read. Or a newspaper aimed at the working class market could reflect the sharing of copies by family members and neighbours.

It is good always to look at the origin of copy readership figures to make a deduction of what percentage are buyers of the original copy.

Similarly the degree of commitment of a reader to a publication is a useful measure, establishing how many copies readers read on a regular basis within a certain time period.

You also need to be aware that readership lags circulation, so that often a declining publication in circulation terms only reflects an Amps decline in readership one or two periods later.

Follow or lead the audience?

Information about audience preferences raises the question of whether editors should follow or lead the consumers of their products.

While the emphasis can swing one way or the other, the reality is that producing successful media content has to do both.

Give people "only" what they think they want, and risk boring them or losing out to more innovative competitors.

It's also no fun to simply reinforce the existing tastes and prejudices of the "customers".

On the other hand, if you ignore where the audience is at, it's impossible to stimulate and

Amps comes out twice a year, and is an aggregate of the two prior periods of fieldwork.

In the case of the broadcast media, there are Tams and Rams, the former offering daily playback of viewership and the latter playback of listening habits six times a year.

In this way, programme-related material can be assessed by all journalists.

But all require analysis by media research professionals who should be able to provide feedback to editors in a way that allows for an in-depth understanding of audience needs, in order to enable informed editorial programming decisions.

All media research needs to be understood in terms of the sampling limitations of the measuring tool – which is generally constrained by lack of money for big enough samples (this is why Amps uses "rolling data" over the past two fieldwork periods).

However, you don't have to eat a whole pot of soup to know it is salty!

Using the data while understanding its limitations is a good route to follow, so that research can be effectively used by editorial as a strategic tool for ongoing audience understanding and growth.

> The press has never been and never should be in business to give the people just what they want. The editor who does his editing predominantly from market research returns isn't worth a damn.
>
> – William Hornby, former executive editor of the *Denver Post*. (From Doug Underwood. 1995. *When MBAs rule the newsroom.* New York: Columbia University Press)

TIP

expose people to new ideas (whether pleasurable or unpalatable).

So, lead and follow. And learn. As "we-media" guru Dan Gillmor points out: in an age of interactivity, there's now a bunch of people "formerly known as the audience".

– Guy Berger

Seeing stories as a management tool

"So, I had this news editor Ron once, the bugger made me rewrite a caption four times without once telling me what was wrong with it.

"I used to live in terror of his grumpy manner. He would be at his desk, seated, and would go through my copy in silence. Time would slow to a snail's pace while I stood in front of him, tense as anything in case my efforts would be rejected again ...

"In the end, I gave up trying to do anything creative and just described what the picture already showed."

You've no doubt heard of "emotional intelligence": the ability to see and deal with the bottom 80% of the human iceberg. Now there's "narrative intelligence", which deals with your capacity to tell or evoke stories. As in the item about Ron, it operates at both the emotional and intellectual levels.

You know all about stories of course, given that the business of your media house is to trade in them. While not every item of your content output is a "story", in the sense of being about real characters, sequence and plots, it's likely that a great deal is. Stories in this classic sense are part of why people are attracted to your content.

But here's the bonus: stories are not just key to your product, they can also be a powerful part of how you manage production – because the nature of an organisation is signalled by the quantity and quality of (oral) stories circulating in it.

People who study this topic remark that while any organisation necessarily relies on impersonal and fact-based analysis to chart its course, the self-same practice does not exactly lend itself to effective communication. That's where story-telling comes in, by default or by design.

Stories are how people make sense of their realities.

Story power

The power of stories lies in:

- Stimulating the imagination and creativity
- Creating feeling and empathy
- Triggering action
- Communicating identity
- Spreading knowledge and values.

How stories work

For people to partake in stories as tellers or as listeners requires that they temporarily position themselves in relation to its discourse. They take up an identity position in order to go with the flow and craft the moral.

What eases this is the extent to which stories resonate with deeper cultural traditions about:
(a) the role of the narrator, and
(b) the themes of the narration.

So, stories confirm or disrupt archetypes about what has always happened.

Accordingly, they help people recognise themselves in others. They reconcile people to difficulty and death, and allow them to dream of alternatives.

Telling stories at particular occasions (at funerals, pubs, meals, meetings) is simply part of the human ritual. The classic themes are about heroes and rogues, journeys and homecomings, gender roles, trust broken or exalted, exoticism, natural disaster and the like.

Most of these can be made up or at least embroidered, as poetic licence is given and taken in regard to story-telling in everyday life. It matters only that the tale is memorable and meaningful.

It's different in a newsroom environment that stresses credibility. Few people here will sacrifice complete accuracy simply for narrative effect on their peers – or at least they'll communicate clearly when this is happening.

Good stories

- Are concrete and graphic.
- Not too complicated to follow, but also not always quite logical.
- Rely on conflict, inconsistency, challenge and surprise.
- Operate at the level of the particular, but have more general significance.
- Generate other stories in the mind of a listener.

How to stimulate stories

They will happen for better or for worse, so work with that reality while also remembering that stories cannot be controlled.

You just have to try and contribute to those that reflect a vibrant and purposeful organisation:

- Actively listen to the stories that are in play.
- Ask questions.
- Share your own stories and encourage others to share theirs.
- Invite colleagues to tell one another's stories.
- Use stories of others as cues for additional narratives to flow.

Narrative literacy

Some stories are more appropriate in particular contexts and for certain purposes.

As story teller or story prompter, this means that when you tell a story, it should be matched to the narratives of the audience and correctly anticipate their reaction.

Be mindful of the body language of "the teller" and "the told".

Vocabulary is obviously important, and so is sequence. Allegories and metaphors can play a rich part.

Themes

Different types of stories that are especially significant, from an editorial management point of view, are those that deal with:

- Heroic achievements and failures (emphasising quest, obstacles, justice, outcomes)
- Disruptive developments (dealing in cases of discomfort, recalcitrance, lack of resolution)
- Nostalgia (innocence, tradition, culture, legacy)
- Professional discourse (extolling editorial independence, for instance)
- Humour (about fools, victims)
- Rites of passage (generations: childhood, youth, old age).

Expert Steve Denning observes that stories can combine various components. His recipe is to highlight a negative angle to get attention, a positive dimension to kindle desire, and a neutral side that expresses the best way forward. Think about what story you want to tell, and what you want to achieve.

Caution: Although interpreting the world in terms of stories has value, sometimes complexities don't make for good yarns and they oughtn't to be squeezed into the format.

– Guy Berger

MORE INFO

Narrative journalism

- Voice, atmospheric detail, building characters, false climaxes, dialogue, flashbacks, internal monologue, sequencing, structure, sourcing and, tone ... the theory of writing non-fiction stories for television, radio or print is challenging, but provides many possibilities for self-learning to improve how you tell stories.

- The **Nieman Narrative Digest** is a rich resource on narrative journalism, mostly for print: it includes story examples, short and long-form narratives, resources, books and bookmarks, glossary, essays on craft and conference presentations. See www.nieman.harvard.edu/narrative/digest/index.html

- ***Writing for story*, by Jon Franklin** (Plume, 1994) gives a step-by-step guide to creating narratives: its subtitle is "Craft secrets of dramatic nonfiction by a two-time Pulitzer prize winner".

Sound leadership

Gaye Davis
Primedia's Group parliamentary correspondent

Managing news for radio takes specialised understanding – especially when you compare it to print.

Right now, because you are reading this, I have your undivided attention. That's a rare luxury for a radio journalist. For most people, radio is something you listen to while doing something else – driving the car, cleaning your house, or doing your job.

So the big challenge for the radio journalist is to get the story across in spite of all the other demands on the listener's attention: kids squabbling on the back seat, the whine of the vacuum cleaner, or the clatter and chatter of the office.

With radio, listeners can't go back to the first few paragraphs to find out what the story's about. They need to understand what you're telling them the first time round.

You don't have much time to do this. On talk radio, news stories run for up to 35 seconds. On music stations, 25 seconds is all the time you have. That's just a few sentences in which to tell the story. Every word has to count.

How you start is crucial. You want to grab the listener's attention. If you imagine you're telling a friend what just happened, it will help you boil the story down to its essence.

Keep your language simple and sentences short. A good rule is one idea per sentence. Long sentences will have you gasping for breath and the listener left behind.

Radio is about what's happening now, what's just happened, or about to happen. So we write in the present tense and use the active, rather than the passive, voice.

News bulletins run throughout the day. You're not going to get the whole story out in a single report, but you can tell it all by taking the story forward in successive bulletins, changing the angle each time.

Often, the best news reports are written around the sound the reporter has gathered at the scene. The wails of crying children or the sound of hammers on metal provide a powerful image as shack dwellers rebuild after a devastating fire.

Writing for radio is a different beast to writing for print. But the need to get good writing – crisp and precise – is still paramount.

(Davis reports for 702 Talk Radio, 567 Cape Talk, Highveld 94.7 and 94.5 Kfm)

MANAGING UPWARDS

Editors and their bosses

While editors need to manage their staffs, it would be wrong to ignore the need to manage relations with their own superiors.

Rule one: Know as much as you can about your boss and keep her/him informed, avoiding surprises.

Rule two: Ensure that this person knows your goals and abilities, and the pressures on you.

Rule three: Build a relationship of trust and honesty, ask for feedback and come with solutions.

(Adapted from Lilian Dunlap, Poynter Institute)

Problems

Here are some suggestions on how to deal with difficult bosses.

1 Analyse what behaviour bugs you – including the possible reasons for it, and for your reaction to it.

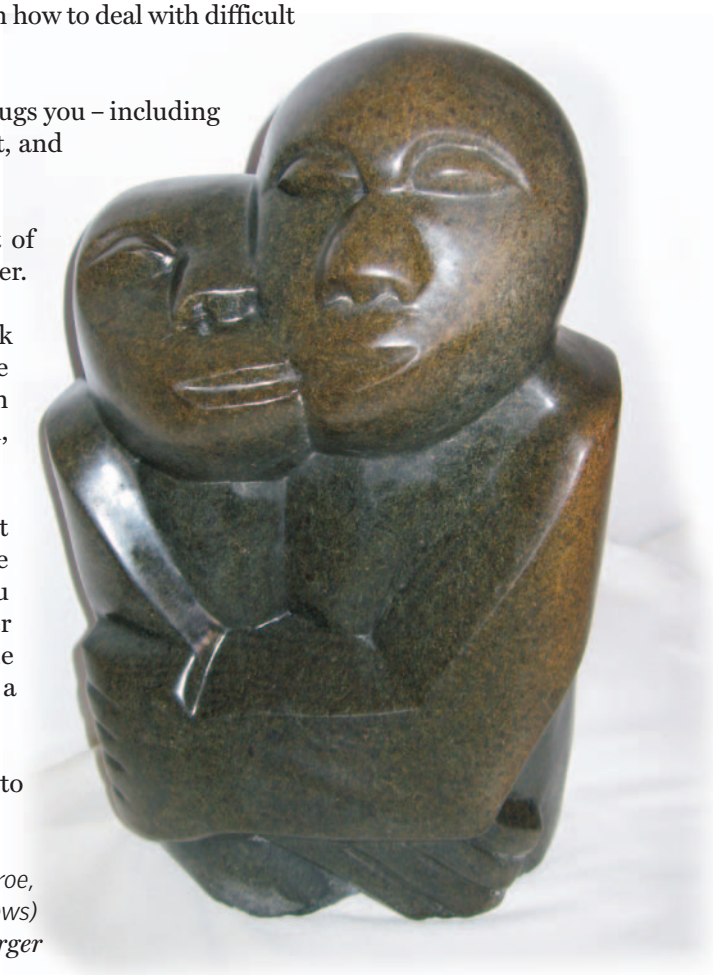
2 Do not react in the heat of the moment – respond later.

3 Discuss, don't accuse – talk about what works in the relationship, and explain what is not working for you, with a focus on specifics.

4 Think about this: is it more important to be right, or to get what you want? Sometimes your bigger goal will be to smooth the relationship, rather than win a particular point.

5 As a very last resort, talk to the boss's superior.

(Adapted from Bryan Monroe, San Jose Mercury News)
– Guy Berger



Getting strategic

No editor can afford to be drawn into the details of production to the extent that you never lift the proverbial snout from the grindstone. Strategic management is the hallmark of an editor's job, and it is based on three considerations:

- Synthesising knowledge of where the company is at.
- Setting goals against this background.
- Developing and managing a plan to achieve these goals.

Triangulating for traction

Contextualising these components are the vision, mission and values of the enterprise.

These are the bigger-picture aspects and, while they need periodic revisiting to adapt to changes, they should usually be valid for a year or more.

There are various takes on the meaning of vision, mission and values, but consider them as designating ends, means and morals:

Vision refers to the kind of impact/status/results the organisation seeks to accomplish in the long-term.

Mission is the general means to get to this end, i.e. the purpose and core business that you're in.

Values provide the moral rudder for the mission – how you steer through various ethical choices en route to the vision.

All three beacons should inform strategic management at any given juncture.

They are especially helpful in an era with the industry in flux. The media "destination" is unclear in a world of increasing information supply, and the "means of transportation" to that destination is highly uncertain.

For instance, should your vision be that your media house should become a leading niche player across several platforms? Is your mission or core business about newspapering or broadcasting, or is it more fundamentally about informing people through news (i.e. about content, not platform)?

It's hard to be definitive about these issues. That's why having values on the table is helpful. They're what helps keep you to a course. So, although no one knows where the media is headed, it helps to look back at whence you came, and in particular to draw on what you and your company stand for.

These values are likely, of course, to be aligned with those of journalism in general and of our society as set out in the Constitution. Take them seriously, they give guidance to shaping and interpreting your vision and mission.

Check your vision statement:

- Is it actually a bundle of platitudes or is there tangible meaning?
- Is it realistic and achievable?
- Is it something that everyone in your company can easily call to mind?

From strategy to action

A vision and a mission are not the same as having strategic goals or objectives.

But such goals should express these more general issues: they should flow from them and in that way help you to prioritise and focus.

To develop and manage according to strategic goals, five activities are recommended:

1. A self-critical situation analysis: internal and external.
2. Setting the actual goals (including narrowing down the list, but also not forgetting goals concerning risk management).
3. Developing a strategic plan with priorities, budget and programme.
4. Communicating around the process and the product (i.e the plan).
5. Monitoring and evaluating whether the goals are being met.

For each strategic goal there should be specific programme actions, each with the following questions answered:

- Who is going to do it?
- When will it be done?

Keeping it visible: the values statement of the Vision Group in Kampala is up on the wall of the boardroom.

- How long will it take?
- How much will it cost?
- What other resources will be needed?
- What priority should it be given?

Check your goals:

- Are they driven by vision, mission and values?
- Are there too many for anyone to remember?
- Do they have a shelf life?
- Are they SMART: Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Realistic and Time-related?

Where are we?

Three tools are often used for a critical analysis of your situation:

1. PEST analysis assesses the wider context in terms of:

- Political factors
- Economic factors
- Social factors
- Technical factors

2. SWOT analysis looks more closely at your organisation:

- Strengths (internal)
- Weaknesses (internal)
- Opportunities (external)
- Threats (external)

Identifying a strength can often reveal ways to exploit an opportunity. And, if you spot an internal weakness which can exacerbate an external threat, you can then take pre-emptive action.

3. Risk analysis, which usually covers:

- Possible trouble in regard to law and regulations
- External economic and environmental risks
- Problems in governance and management
- Financial factors (fraud, cash flow)
- Operational issues (eg technology)

Prioritising the risks, in terms of both the likelihood of them happening and strategic goals they can affect, lets you identify early-warning indicators that will signal when something is going wrong and enable you to develop contingency plans.

– Guy Berger

TEMPLATE

A business plan

Here's a format for writing up a strategic editorial plan (aka **a "business plan"**).

- Executive summary (circa one page)
- Company profile
- Vision, Mission, Values and strategy
- Market context: PEST and SWOT analyses
- Risk assessment
- Strategic goals
- Activities to deliver the product and achieve the goals (covering platforms, standards, staffing, skill sets)
- Financial plan
- Monitoring and evaluation plan
- Appendices

Negotiating budgets

Kevin Ritchie

Managing Editor of *Saturday Star*, Former *DFA* editor (1993-2002) and manager (1996-2002)

The most important thing to know about budgeting is that it is the key to editorial independence.

Far too many editorial types tend to glibly leave the messy end of the business in the hands of the accountants and then we tear out our hair in despair when we see what has been wrought in our names.

There's only one way around it and that's to get stuck in. Otherwise, make peace with the tedious refrain "there isn't budget for it".

Financial management, as much as human resources management, is a critical function of any business. However, it's even more important for editorial departments because we are, in the parlance, "cost centres" made up of people producing "intellectual capital".

We don't generate revenue. We're just a big debit every month on the balance sheet, which is what you might hear when you go to management meetings.

It's all a bit disingenuous since what we do makes everything possible: we create the content (the product), which is then sold (to readers or audiences) and

TRY THIS

The budget: tips for triumphing

1. Ideally, an overall budget should be built, brick by brick, from the bottom, with the most junior manager submitting budget proposals to an immediate senior manager – in accordance with the overall business plan.
2. Budget proposals are seldom agreed without amendment, so anticipate enough time for consultation and negotiation.
3. Only if you understand and operate budgets well, can you make a serious case for increases. Be able to show how an investment today can lead to savings or extra income-generation in the future. By understanding how line items related to performance, you are also in a position to explain what cuts could mean for quality of output.
4. A budget is a plan that defines limits within which people are expected to work. Because of the fluid nature of media production, editors should ideally be empowered to vary expenditure within the limits. Know where you can shuffle money across categories when need be, what happens to salaries earmarked for unfilled positions, and whether you can retain and reallocate unspent funds.
5. Be on top of budget management. You need have-and-know procedures for spending, and systems for monitoring allowances, reimbursements and cash flows. The knowledge lets you implement cost controls or reallocations when needed.
6. Consider broad transparency, and a degree of devolution, around the budget. In these ways, you can involve staffers in taking responsibility for the budget. It can help general performance if people are aware of what things cost.

(acknowledgements to Radio and Television News Directors Foundation and John Prescott Thomas: Broadcaster's Media Management Manual).

– Guy Berger

MY EXPERIENCE

> There's an old rule in broadcasting: the producer says the glass is half-full; the engineer says it's half-empty; the accountant says the glass is twice as big as it needs to be.
>
> – John Prescott Thomas, *Broadcaster's Media Management Manual*

then onsold again to advertisers.

Without us there's no product. But all this is still no excuse to bury your head in the sand when it comes to budgets.

Own the process, understand the arcane terms and terminologies, and gird yourself for the annual budget meeting.

Do this by planning realistically for what you hope to achieve in the coming year.

If there's an election coming up, if you plan to launch a new editorial product, if members of your staff are pregnant and due to go off on maternity leave, plan for it. Put freelance or contract staff in your budget, provide a bit of fat in the salary line to pay merit increases and retain key staff, plan to buy extra equipment. Put together whatever it is you need to reasonably do your job.

Don't be ridiculous either. Keep in mind inflation and other "cost drivers", and work out your needs accordingly.

At financial meetings, you will be faced with the commercial realities of the newspaper or radio/TV station that you work for.

This is where, in good media organisations, there is a debate, there are compromises. But that only happens if you're well prepared. If you're not, one of two things is going to happen: you're either going to get steamrollered or laughed right out of the meeting.

Be prepared up front for what you are prepared to give in order to take. Most importantly, know what is not up for negotiation.

At the end of it, you will emerge with an editorial budget which, in the best media organisations, is yours to spend as you see fit in order to produce the best editorial content in your power. You may not exceed the budget, not without grovelling, but nor may anyone from any other department interfere in how you spend it.

That is the key to your independence. Don't ask me, ask Harold Evans, the legendary editor of the London *Sunday Times* who against his better judgement accepted the editorship of *The Times* from Rupert Murdoch.

He never got his budget. Within six months, he was effectively emasculated; by the end of the year he had been fired.

That's how important budgets are.

MY VIEW

Vital importance of Chinese Wall

Raymond Louw

Editor and publisher of *Southern Africa Report*

The Chinese Wall, newspaper-speak for the invisible division between editorial and advertising, goes back to a time when it was holy writ that the departments were kept well segregated; when it was accepted as vital for editorial integrity and independence that the advertising department did not intrude.

If space salespersons suggested what news stories should contain or how they should be run, the concept of a newspaper acting independently and publishing news in the public interest would be destroyed. Readers would quickly perceive that the interest being served was not theirs but that of advertisers – and stop buying the paper.

So the need to maintain that Chinese Wall between the two departments was not only a matter of principle but of survival. Incidentally, it also applies to the barriers between management and the circulation department, and editorial.

The need to attract advertising spend, the lifeblood of newspapers, goes hand in hand with striving to gain maximum readers and thus increased influence. The advertising aim is so generalised and intertwined with gaining readers that its influence on editorial is limited. Indeed, the financial backing and resources produced spurs papers to improve their news gathering and other services to achieve greater reader approval.

These principles may result in a subeditor placing a story about an air crash on the page carrying the airline's advertisement – because ideally the sub-editor is oblivious of the advertising layout.

Increasingly, however, the ideal is being departed from when advertising is not clearly defined or when special supplements on commercial or business topics – probably suggested by the advertisement manager because of the adspend potential – contain editorial suspected of being hidden advertising.

Journalists are concerned about the growing encroachment on their skills and being turned into copy-writers. But papers such as the London *Financial Times* insist on the editorial being done by their informed journalists because of their critical approach.

Also suspected is the manner in which big-spending advertisers – or powerful groups in industry, business, religion or politics – try to influence editorial content.

However, all this is far removed from the reverse-advertising influence practised by Russian journalists (and others) who demand fees from companies for placing puffery about them in their papers' news pages.

(Southern Africa Report is a weekly subscription newsletter which does not carry advertising.)

MY EXPERIENCE

Being an editor-publisher

Matthew Buckland

GM of publishing and social media at 24.com, former GM of *M&G Online*

You often find a blurring of editor and publisher functions in smaller, start-up media operations. Budgets are tight; people are expected to multi-task and do a bit of everything, so these senior roles are played by one person.

Yet it's not just in start-ups that you see this phenomenon, but also in the broader media where margins are becoming tighter. In many ways the editor role, in the traditional sense, is in decline. Apart from a few exceptions, editors no longer have the power they used to wield but may find themselves making "pragmatic" compromises.

Editors are often directors or shareholders of the media company they serve, again blurring this role.

In this age it seems unreasonable not to expect the editor to be a commercial animal as well as being an editorial one, keeping one eye on copy but also watching out for the company he or she works for. Or is it?

The Chinese Wall separating commercial and editorial functions is there to prevent a conflict of interest which may or may not affect the independence of editorial content and approach. The counter-argument is that in face of no other option, you need to opt for the pragmatic approach. Separate editor-publisher functions are often a luxury in a small publishing company.

The problems are mitigated if there is a sophisticated understanding of the different tensions around these roles and what they mean for a company. As long as there is a sense that content is supreme, an editor can act against the short-term commercial interests for a longer-term gain that enhances the paper's editorial standing.

In many respects we have a mature market. Many advertisers understand the editorial-commercial divide; some don't and may threaten to withdraw their advertising – but it doesn't happen often.

In fact at the *Mail & Guardian Online* we often published critical stories of our successful telecoms monopoly, Telkom. Yet they are one of the bigger advertisers. Interestingly, the more critical stories we published about them, the more advertising they took out with us. It was obviously not our intention to be critical for the sake of being critical: we also sang Telkom's praises where it was due – regardless of the advertising they bought.

> "It would lead to internal conflict, but never to the wrong decision."

Advertising is there to boost an advertiser's brand and secure return on investment. That's its sole purpose, as far as we were concerned.

For three years at *M&G Online* we were in start-up mode, so for a while I was both editor and publisher. It would lead to internal conflict, but never to the wrong decision. In my mind, the principle of writing about the truth in the public interest reigned supreme.

That was the long-term vision, which in time would result in our success. Losing advertising contracts here and there were short-term losses that did not bother me.

When we grew bigger we split the editorial and publisher functions: I took a solely strategic and commercial role. I'd question the editor on stories, but he always had the last say.

View from management

Mike Robertson
Media managing director of Avusa

This chapter comes with a health warning. The company which I now head has, in its various incarnations, been responsible for the closure of four newspapers in the past 25 years. All could have been avoided had the editors and managers involved observed the five protocols listed below.

1. Establish the ground rules (A)

The relationship between editors and managers in the South African papers I worked on in the '80s and early '90s was for the most part adversarial.

Bitter wars were fought as editors sought jealously to protect their domain while management responded by squeezing editorial budgets and blamed editors for circulation, printing or advertising failures that, in hindsight, had nothing to do with journalistic inadequacy but rather managerial incompetence.

Soon after I was appointed editor of the *Sunday Times* in 1998 I heard a speaker from the *New York Times* explain how that title had moved to address a similarly adversarial situation. "Editorial excellence is essential for profitability. Profits sustain excellence," was the formulation they arrived at.

I latched onto it and, serendipitously, had a publisher in Brian Pottinger, himself a former editor of the title, who agreed we should adopt the same philosophy. Had we not done so, the *Sunday Times* and the other Avusa titles which subsequently endorsed the same thinking would never have achieved the editorial successes, circulation and readership growth (1,5-million readers in the case of the *Sunday Times*) or the record profit growth recorded over the past decade.

2. Establish the ground rules (B)

The most important document governing the relationship between an editor and management is his or her letter of appointment. My letter of appointment to the editorship of the *Sunday Times* made it clear that:

- While the board of directors of then Times Media Limited was ultimately responsible for the editorial policy of the paper, as outlined in the letter I was given the authority to interpret this brief on a day-to-day basis without interference from management.
- While I was expected to work with the commercial managers I was appointed by the board and had the right to address its members on certain defined matters.
- The letter also outlined what the board expected in terms of news reporting, commentary and, given that the *Sunday Times* is a commercial paper, stated that the expectation was that the paper would broadly favour a free enterprise system.

Significantly, however, the letter was silent on the kind of newspaper the editor was expected to produce, its mission, core values, the target audience and on any measure that would be used to determine whether the editor was performing his mandate or not.

When I later became CEO of the then Johncom media division, I discovered that all other editors' letters of appointment were silent on this subject.

All new editors' letter of appointment now contain an attachment instructing them to agree up front with their publishers to either endorse the mission statement of the paper they are to edit or to agree to a new mission statement in conjunction with their publishers.

If, as inevitably there will be, there are disagreements between editors and man-

agers about the direction a paper is taking, we return to these documents to help shape our decision-making.

By way of example the mission statement of the *Sunday Times* that Pottinger and I arrived at was: "To provide knowledge that enriches the lives of readers." In hindsight we should have said "share knowledge" but back in 1998 reader interactivity was not viewed with the same importance it is now.

Reader research identified that KNOWLEDGE was the most important element that readers, who fell into the *Sunday Times*' LSM 6-10 target audience, were looking for. They wanted information assessed and asserted by someone they TRUST. Being a Sunday paper they also wanted ENTERTAINMENT and a paper that could be read by the whole FAMILY. Those are the four core values of the Sunday Times. At other papers the values differ. COMMUNITY, for example, is the core value readers want from our Eastern Cape dailies.

The measures we use to assess whether editors are meeting the needs of readers in their target audience are:

- Circulation as measured by the ABC (Audit Bureau of Circulation).
- Readership as measured by Amps and Target Group Index (TGI).

In addition, every two years we conduct extensive research to ascertain whether the paper is perceived by readers to be providing the values they identified as core and determine whether new needs have arisen amongst the target market.

3. Codes of Conduct

Most South African newspapers subscribe to the Press Ombudsman's code of conduct. In addition Avusa has its own codes and policies. They cover reporting on race, the acceptance of gifts and freebies, and editorial accuracy.

These codes are not only essential for good journalism but are important defences for editors against interference by managers or boards when, as is increasingly the case, they come under pressure from politicians or business people unhappy that their indiscretions or criminal activities have been exposed.

4. Co-operation vs Interference

There are times when the strict walls dividing editorial and commercial need to come down. But it helps to define the parameters in advance so co-operation does not become interference:

- **Launch of new products, re-designs or re-formats.** My experience has been that when these are undertaken by either editorial or commercial in isolation they inevitably fail and cost a great deal of money. Our best results have been achieved when we appointed multi-disciplinary task teams and gave them the authority and responsibility to get on with the job.
- **Budgets.** The *New York Times* maxim mentioned above should be uppermost in both managers' and editors' minds when going through the budgeting process. Many newspapers are struggling and do not have large amounts of money to invest in editorial. At the same time, however, much of what passes for cost-cutting is simply short-sighted and bad management. My preferred option is to agree on an overall increase (fortunately we have not yet had annual decreases) with the editor or managing editor, and leave it to them to re-arrange their spending. I had this arrangement with Pottinger and was able to increase journalist's salaries by over 30% in four years without ever exceeding the overall budget. The money came from savings in spending on stationery, transport and telephone calls, and by ensuring that when leave was taken it was recorded.
- **Printing.** Unless editors take the time to understand the limitations of the presses on which their papers are printed, they are doomed to be in constant conflict with their opera-

tions departments. Many SA papers are printed on old presses. Yes, management should, must and will invest, but such upgrading costs hundreds of millions of rand and is not achieved overnight. In the meantime, understand what fonts print better on the old presses and make more use of white space. Most importantly, agree on a production schedule that enables the paper to get out on time – readers might get annoyed that a paper does not have the latest sports results but they get even more annoyed when they cannot get it at all.

- **Deadlines and circulation.** Editors need to see the link between these. For example, if the *Sunday Times* is an hour late in going off stone, the last bundle off the press is delayed by an hour. That translates to about 10 000 fewer copies sold, as newspapers have a shelf life of only a few hours. If the paper is not available when readers go shopping, they are unlikely to go back to see if it has arrived.
- **Advertising measures.** Measures need to be negotiated as the economy grows or declines. But editors and managers should agree on both a minimum paging and a minimum editorial measure that will never be breached. For what it's worth, though, research indicates readers prefer smaller, tightly edited daily papers to the sprawling, insert-laden ones we tend to produce.
- **Ad sizes.** Newspapers have to compete with TV, radio and internet, all of which are introducing new devices to overcome advertising avoidance by viewers, listeners and readers. Unless we compete, newspapers will lose out to more innovative mediums and, as most newspapers in SA make money from advertising rather than cover prices, the results could be disastrous. Our approach is to be open to the more radical shaped-ads on pages where we carry essential information (eg stocks and sports results) while sticking to conventional shapes on news pages. The final decision rests with the editor.
- **Sponsored features.** Ad departments constantly come up with requests to link commercial space with traditional editorial space. After years of rebuffing them we finally agreed to allow sponsorship, but limited to features such as stock prices, puzzles, the traffic, shipping, weather and sports results. In so doing, we believe we have not compromised the editorial independence of our journalists.
- **Surveys.** Nothing has done more to blur the lines between commercial and editorial than the manner in which newspapers are doing surveys. There is nothing wrong with a country survey as performed by the *Financial Times* or a Top Brands survey as conducted by the *Sunday Times* using Markinor research. But far too many surveys are commercial propaganda masquerading as independent editorial assessment. Readers are not fooled. For short-term commercial gain, titles that do this are undermining the integrity of their brands.

5. Communication

Editors are both journalists and managers. To fulfil the latter role it is essential they communicate clearly to staff and to management. However, every time we do a climate survey one of the primary concerns expressed by newsrooms is the lack of communication. International publishers report similar findings.

I don't have a solution other than to stress two points: an e-mail is not communication, and remember to keep staff abreast of not just editorial developments but also what's going on in the commercial side of the business.

AS I SEE IT

Put in guidelines & communication

Sandra Gordon
Media entrepreneur and publisher of *The Media* magazine

Poor definition is the root cause of confusion between the roles of editor and publisher.

While most dictionaries define the former as a person in charge of a newspaper or magazine, in reality publishers are in charge, too, and tend to call the shots because they are responsible for the bottom line. So the stage is set for tension and acrimony.

There are two main sources of complaint: commercial interference is often given as the reason for dissatisfaction among content gatherers, while publishers remain tight-fisted in the face of constant demands for increased spending on editorial.

This is where the tension usually manifests itself. However, more often than not, it is a result of lack of clear vision from the very top and of poor communication between the role-players during crucial moments – most notably as deadlines loom and stress levels reach epic proportions.

A financial examination of traditional media indicates that most media business models rely on income from the sale of subscriptions and copies plus advertising and sponsorship revenue.

Here are two common examples of the dynamics that have to be managed on a regular basis:

1 **Sales people** report to publishers; they are seen as the breadwinners and are often pampered because of this role. They are prone to offering clients free editorial in return for advertising.

The editor then clashes with the publisher, maintaining the brand's editorial integrity is at stake. Who capitulates? The publisher could lose revenue and his sales person commission, but the editor stands to lose her reputation and sully that of the product.

If management sets strict editorial guidelines (a credo is preferable) and communicates these to all stakeholders including the clients, this clash can be avoided.

> "Sales are dropping and advertising revenue is following suit, yet the editor wants more investment in content."

2 **Editors** run hard-hitting headlines often detrimental to corporate advertisers who then threaten to pull their advertising. A case in point was South African Airways, which resented certain newspaper exposés of the parastatal and its management. The newspapers stood firm under their policy of the public's right to know.

Sales are dropping and advertising revenue is following suit, yet the editor wants more investment in content. The editor should be given access to top-line financials with the assumptions, and the publisher should keep the editor in the loop as the year progresses.

Tough judgement calls are an everyday occurrence in media. With clear editorial and sales guidelines, and regular communication between publishers and editors, a great deal of the horrific dynamic that leads to frayed tempers can be avoided.

Surveys and supplements

Lesley Cowling

Senior lecturer in the journalism programme at Wits University

Adrian Hadland

Research director in HSRC's democracy and governance research programme

The complex relationship between advertising and editorial is, at root, simple: advertisers are keen to be associated with quality content that is independent and critical, but which also portrays their products in a good light; commercial media rely on advertising revenue for economic survival.

Our research shows that, as print publications battle for profitability within the business cycle, there is growing pressure to appeal more directly to advertisers, to tailor-make products and deliver audiences in a host of new ways.

This has led to the creation of new structures within media organisations which plan thematically driven surveys and supplements paid for by advertisers, but which read like normal editorial content. Indeed, the rapidly growing client magazine sector is almost entirely geared toward publishing products that are designed to represent the interests and serve the clients of major corporates.

These developments, which reflect a global trend, have tended to blur the line between editorial content that is independently generated in traditional journalistic fashion and content that is "paid for" by a third party.

At times, newspapers have carried content in a "paid-for" supplement that is at odds with items carried in the main news section.

An example of this was in The Star in 2006 when a news story portraying the squalor of downtown Johannesburg was contradicted by stories carried in a paid-for supplement later that month that touted the blooming gentrification of the same inner city.

Clearly, editorial integrity is under threat from new forms of advertising (such as supplements) as well as from new forms of media product (such as client publishing). This has implications for the credibility and quality of the product, and for journalistic professional and ethical practice.

Strategies to combat this encroachment on editorial integrity include firm guidelines over advertorial and paid-for content usage. These guidelines should include the clear signaling of content that is not generated by the newsroom, and also a requirement that reader and public interest must be an important factor in producing such content.

In addition, there should be a strengthening of media ethics knowledge within both news and advertising/marketing departments.

(Advertising in the News. Paid-for content and the South African print media – Adrian Hadland, Lesley Cowling and Bate Felix Tabi Tabe. Download from: www.hsrcpress.ac.za/product.php?productid=2190)

MY EXPERIENCE

Paid content in magazines

Ann Donald

Former *Fairlady* editor and owner of Kalk Bay Books

Case study 1

A market research focus group, discussing a magazine, was asked to select articles they had particularly enjoyed. One participant picked out a page on a treatment for a skin condition from which she suffered.

It was clearly marked "advertorial" and carried a packshot of the product. In all other instances, it looked like editorial. The woman had no idea it had been paid for, and thought the product picture was simply helpful.

The editorial team was taken aback: the reader had not understood that "advertorial" indicates "paid for".

To add to the confusion, various words are used in different magazines: "promotion", "advertising promotion" and "advertising feature" all obfuscate the source of the content.

For clarity, any page carrying paid-for content should be marked "advertisement" and should be different from editorial pages in design and writing style to ensure readers know the information is not editorially endorsed.

Case study 2

A fashion editorial spread draws from various boutiques, designers and retailers for clothing. A patterned dress is needed for one shot. There is a beautifully crafted dress from a small designer with no budget for advertising. And, from a large retail chain which advertises regularly in the title, there is a run-of-the-mill dress copied from a European garment sourced by the chain's buyer on a "buying" spree on the continent six months earlier.

The fashion editor, highly regarded for her style and taste, has to choose. Against her creative judgment, she selects the humdrum dress. The reader, who relies on the magazine for independent fashion advice, doesn't know there was ever a choice. When she sees the small designer's dress in another magazine, however, her loyalty may shift to the title that offers her quality information.

The big retail chains calculate the amount of "free editorial" they receive in return for their advertising spend. When it drops below an acceptable level, the editor may be pressured to encourage the fashion editor to be more accommodating.

Fashion and beauty editorial pages influence readers' buying decisions, so advertisers badly want the apparently independent editorial endorsement. Because they place extensive advertising, they have power to call the shots for "endorsement". And, because there are so many more magazines to which they can transfer their spend, publishers bend every which way to accommodate them. This is the coalface at which editors lose their jobs.

Know the line

A key function of any editor is to know where the line lies between editorial and advertorial – between readers' interests and advertisers' interests.

The advertisers' intention is to persuade the reader their product is being recommended – editorial endorsement is trusted by readers who believe the editor is looking out for their interests. The publisher's intention is to make more money by keeping the advertiser happy. The editor should understand exactly when these two interests are compromising those of the reader.

Ultimately, chasing advertising revenue at the expense of editorial quality and integrity will harm the title's circulation as readers become disenchanted. Then everybody loses.

It's not just for editors

Across print, broadcast and online, editorial independence can be taken to cover some or all of four distinct realms.

1. Editors

The editor should have the clear right to make final decisions on day-to-day editorial matters. Such power flows from the fact that no editor should ever have to take responsibility (legal or otherwise) for content that is decided outside his or her authority.

The principle therefore secures the independence of an editor from arbitrary owner intervention, and is a bulwark against pressure from advertisers, sponsors and government.

Former *Telegraph* (UK) editor Max Hastings once had to assert his editorial independence against Conrad Black, the paper's then proprietor and now a famous felon. He argued: "Conrad, if you are not happy with the paper, you would be wrong to keep me here even if I was working seven days a week. But if you think the paper is being competently run, then surely it's up to me how I do it?" (Hastings later resigned when his boss interfered in the appointment of staff).

Editorial independence for editors is intended to prevent any undermining of the position. While modern proprietors should be concerned with a triple bottom line for the business (financial, social and environmental performance), the editor also has to give special attention to journalistic performance.

Sometimes editors may also want to reserve a final say over advertising content, due to clashes with editorial ethics and the way certain ads can tarnish the medium as a whole. Even Rupert Murdoch agreed that Harold Evans, when editor of *The Times* (UK), could retain veto rights in this area.

What editorial independence does is put a parameter around the expectations of owners and managers vis-à-vis editors. This was recognised by bosses like the MD of BDFM, Mzimkulu Malunga, who told a Sanef workshop in 2004: "Editors need to be protected from bloodhounds like ourselves."

2. Reporters

Editorial independence is not independence purely for the "editor". It also applies, with some qualifications, to the need for reporters to be independent of their editors, especially if their editors cross certain boundaries. This right relates to the professional autonomy and responsibility of each rank-and-file journalist, and puts a check on abuses of editors' power.

Without this right, there is the danger of micro-management and disempowerment, as in the 2006 blacklisting of expert sources at SABC – a practice that the Sisulu Report found to have impacted "negatively on morale, initiative and an appropriate sense of ownership by

CHECKLIST

Are you independent?

Editorial independence for editors means having authority over all or most of the following:

- Day-to-day content (legally responsible)
- Appointment of staff
- Protection of staff from pressures
- Editorial quality
- Advertisements that tarnish brand
- Political reportage
- Source selection and usage
- Gifts and favours
- Conflicts of interest
- Pressures from advertising staff
- Surveys and advertorial
- Use of budget

But it is also limited by or subject to:

- Letter of appointment
- Vision, mission and values of the company
- Policy guidelines and stipulations (preferably written)
- Business/commercial responsibilities
- Reporting lines

executive producers, producers and presenters". SABC editorial protocols say that each staffer is responsible for output at their level, within a framework of consultation upwards, but in actual practice the power resided at the top.

The World Radio and TV Council, cited in the Sisulu Report, recommends an administrative distinction "between two levels of management: day-to-day business, on the one hand, and general policies and long-term decisions, on the other hand". According to the Australian Broadcasting Corporation, subject to normal editorial management and controls, programme-makers are responsible for exercising editorial judgement.

At the same time, editorial independence for journalists has to be within parameters laid down by their editorial seniors (and reporters should only take instruction from them – never from managers, boards, owners or advertisers).

3. Editorial as a whole

Overall, editorial independence also includes independence of editorial decisions from the exclusively economic imperatives of a media institution, and in particular from those staffers who are responsible for generating revenues for the business and not the integrity of editorial content.

Editorial independence was once described by Andreas Whittam Smith, the founding editor of the *Independent* (UK), as simply a promise to the audience "that everything you find in the newspaper represents the editorial team's own agenda and nobody else's; neither the advertising department's, nor the owner's, nor any political party's, nor any business interests".

4. In regard to non-industry forces

Independence from sources, even when copy is checked with a source, means that the decision about what to run with rests with editorial. It also means independence in regard to influences like gifts or favours that could compromise editorial.

To enhance credibility about editorial independence, best practice involves transparently acknowledging any possible conflict of interests, such as stories about the owners themselves or about associated companies.

Limits of editorial independence

Former *Sowetan* editor Mike Siluma once wrote: "You can't expect someone to bankroll a publication and walk away without worrying what will be published. That's not the real world". This signals that most editors are not sovereign figures.

In South African history, perhaps the only case of an employee managing to oust his boss was the late Donald Woods, crusading editor of the *Daily Dispatch*. With his staff, he appealed to the company chair who immediately retired the problematic manager. In some foreign cases, like *Stern* magazine in Germany, an advisory board of seven editorial staffers can veto the appointment or dismissal of an editor-in-chief.

Usually, editorial independence does not operate in terms of conflict or power, but neither does it exist in a vacuum. It means only free rein within the bounds of the media house's values and policies. There is no licence by editors to violate journalistic ethics and the law. Or their employer's interpretation of these.

This can lead to the kind of letter that Harold Wodson, editor of the predecessor to the *Daily News*, received from his superior about his Rotary Club activities: "It is not advisable for anyone holding an important editorial position to be prominently associated with outside public work ... An editor should retain a complete independence concerning the activities of any body or institution whose activities are likely to become the subject of public controversy or discussion."

The context is well described by John Douglas Pringle, editor of the *Guardian* and the *Observer* in Britain and twice editor of the *Sydney Morning Herald*, who wrote: "Once an editor has accepted an appointment, he must be prepared to accept the right of the proprietor to

decide finally (on policy etc): he may prevaricate, but in the long run he must either resign or give in. After all, we live under a capitalistic system and a newspaper is a property like any other. The proprietor or the managing director of a newspaper can hardly be denied the right to dictate policy."

Editor-employer relations

Editorial policy sets the parameters for the relationships between an editor and employer – and frames the terms around which differences can occur.

Usually, relations are convivial because employers tend to hire editors whose views accord with theirs. The result is that most editors are able to say that they never receive editorial directives from on high.

The common position has been set out by Victor Norton, who once edited the *Cape Times*: "My freedom of decision is guaranteed in a clause in my contract that reads: 'Provided they do not involve any departure from the established and recognised policy and practice of the *Cape Times*, you will conform to all instructions and directions from time to time given by the chairman of the board of directors on behalf of the company.'

"In addition, the traditions of the *Cape Times* establish very carefully and forcibly that the expression of opinion is the function of the editor. In more than 20 years close association with the *Cape Times*, I have not known this requirement to be infringed or questioned, in the letter or the spirit, overtly or covertly, by any director or any officer of the *Cape Times*."

Where tensions nevertheless arise, most editors have to "accept the fact that in the final argument about policy or anything else the proprietor's views must prevail", as stated by newspaper historian Flather.

In some cases, the editor then makes a decision to part ways. Here's William Monypenny, appointed editor of *The Star* in 1899, who later fell out with the owners over the political line of the paper: "It is because I am fully conscious of the generous licence the proprietors of *The Star* have accorded to me in difficult times that I have felt bound in honour, now that our difference of opinion on a question of first importance has come to a crisis, to withdraw of my own accord and not to place them in a false position by continuing to oppose them from a platform which they themselves have provided me."

Some people may think guarantees of editorial independence are not worth the paper they are written on when it comes to the crunch. But this cynicism ignores the fact that it makes possible a discussion about disagreements which involves more than subjective positions or unfettered proprietorial power. It can also be useful if a relationship breaks down to the point of going to court.

Playing it straight

Many proprietors do recognise and respect the value of editorial independence. They can eventually fire an editor, yet as journalism educator Franz Krüger has pointed out: "Far-sighted owners and companies will understand that respect for editorial independence and ethics is in their long-term commercial interest." This position is what helps underpin the credibility of the medium, and dispel suspicions that owners operate via a secret agenda.

This was the case when Peter Bruce, then editor of the *Financial Mail*, endorsed an opposition political party during elections in 1999, in conspicuous contrast to his ANC-leader boss Cyril Ramaphosa. That Bruce survived a firing showed that his employers did not regard him as their puppet, much as they publicly disagreed with his position.

Where tensions may arise is when proprietors only learn of controversial decisions after publication or broadcast.

But some editors have chosen to take a risk in this regard. Former *Rand Daily Mail* editor Lawrence Gandar preferred to surprise his bosses rather than seek their permission in advance. He once

changed the *Rand Daily Mail*'s support for the United Party to the Progressive Party without informing the board chairman, because he feared this would give him an opportunity to veto his policy. He was prepared to accept sanction afterwards, even if this meant losing his job.

Policies help

What can make for a smoother relationship between editor and employer is where editorial policies are spelt out in detail, rather than being vague and open to radically contrasting interpretations.

For the SABC as public broadcaster, an extensive set of policies is supposed to guide any editorial decision. They give substance to what is meant by public broadcasting and also define the bounds for coverage of politics, issues of public taste, use of offensive language and stereotypes, privacy and disclosure around HIV/Aids status. These policies are meant to bind all editorial practitioners at the broadcaster.

Most newspapers have simpler policies which provide for more flexibility and autonomy, but which also are less useful in terms of regulating disputes that may arise.

In the SABC's case, accountability for adherence to policy is spread across several agencies: Parliament, the board, the regulator Icasa and the Minister of Communications (as representative of the "shareholder"). Lacking here is a system enabling accountability to the public such as through regular stakeholder forums or general imbizos.

Reporting lines

For privately owned media, there are usually single reporting lines for editors. Said former *Cape Times* editor Victor Norton: "My contract requires that for part of my functions which require the expenditure of money I must act in concert with the general manager and, failing agreement with that officer, the disputed proposal must

4 BOTTOM LINES FOR EDITORS

Bottom line = criteria for measuring organisational success AND sustainability

1 Journalistic performance = content quality and its impact on society.

2 Financial performance = the lasting economic impact of the organisation on its economic environment, which is more than just the internal profits made.

3 Social performance = impact on people, such as whether the organisation has fair and beneficial business practices towards labour, the community and region/country.

4 Environmental performance = impact on the planet, or whether the organisation benefits the ecology or at least curtails its environmental impact by managing its consumption of energy and non-renewables and reducing waste.

be referred to the board of directors." According to Harold Evans at *The Times* (UK), Murdoch gave him a guarantee of equal status to the chief managing executive of the newspaper "in regard to equality of access to the proprietor on matters of editorial budget and space; and a recognition that that the management had no business making editorial representations to the staff or anyone other than the editor".

The issue was contested in South Africa in 1995 when editor of *The Star*, Richard Steyn, resigned rather than report to a publisher instead of direct to the board – which is now the dominant institutional arrangement.

The difference between the two was significant for *The Times*'s Evans, who feared it could lead to the power of editing being handed over to managers who could then dictate the kinds of stories on which the editorial budget should be spent. It is not the case that editors without regular recourse to the board are potentially weakened vis-à-vis management; there is no intrinsic reason why they should lose editorial control as a result of this.

Business responsibilities

Over time, the idea of an editor standing aloof from the business fortunes of a media house has faded.

In the 1960s, Lawrence Gandar hated long meetings about *Rand Daily Mail* circulation and advertising, instead feeling "it was marvellous to be able to concentrate on your job, in your sphere and do your best without spending tremendous time on other things". But the ethos has shifted since then.

According to one newspaper executive in the US: "Once upon a time, editors may have had the ability or the luxury to take no interest in the workings of other departments. Now, editors are learning that they must."

In that country, the concept of the "total newspaper" in the 1970s began to see editorial, advertising, circulation, research and promotion functions being co-ordinated around marketing concerns.

LA Times publisher Mark Wiles took it further from the mid-1990s by trampling over the romanticism of journalism. His thrust was that editors should think like business people and the staff

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remember their obligations to shareholders. Previously involved in marketing "Cheerios" for breakfast, he was dubbed the "cereal killer", a man focused on cost cutting, share price and the "product" driven by focus groups. But journalistic morale fell sharply, circulation stayed stagnant, and eventually Wiles moved on.

A similar outlook was exhibited by Martin Newland, appointed in 2003 to a short-lived stint as editor of the *Daily Telegraph* (UK): "You can't afford to be precious any more about splitting editorial and commercial. Nowadays 40-50% of an editor's time is marketing and commercial ... We are a business. Our journalists are proud that we make a profit."

Doug Underwood, author of the book "When MBAs rule the newsroom", has raised strong cautions not just about editors' centre of gravity shifting from audiences to revenues, but also the practical challenges this causes.

The "editor-manager", he writes, "is expected to carry on in the best traditions of journalistic excellence, but is expected to share the responsibility for the newspaper as a 'profit centre'."

The scope and tension of the responsibility causes stress, Underwood argues, because it requires editors to be "immersed in readership surveys, marketing plans, memos and management training, and budget planning goals – the new trappings of a business where marketing the newspaper has become the top goal of newspaper managers and where attention to the bottom line has replaced many of the tasks that once occupied editors' time."

While notions of a "Chinese Wall" between editors and non-editorial sides of a media house are unlikely to ever return, questions remain about the proper priorities and use of time by the people who should in fact have been appointed to oversee the editorial mix.

– Guy Berger

(This section on editorial independence draws on research by Kevin Ritchie).

> Reporting used to be like hunting and gathering of food. All you had to do was to get the information and bring it back. After food became plentiful, interest went to processing and packaging.

– Phillip Meyer, academic

Alert: reporter in trouble and how to handle it

Mark van der Velden

Editor of the South African Press Association (Sapa)

Cops and reporters generally get along quite well. Neither side is perfect but each tries to live with the other's faults.

But clashes of interest are inevitable. Unless cool heads prevail, the fight can become ugly; even silly. Of interest to the public, yes, but rarely in its interest.

As editor, it's your job – besides being accountable for your reporters' ethical behaviour – to protect the space they need to get the story.

When the cops decide – intentionally or just plain ham-handedly – to close down that space and the "reporter in trouble" alert pops up, it's got to be your cool-headed intervention and pragmatic application of legal and constitutional rights that makes the difference.

Decide early what your objective is: vengeful laying into ground-level cops (careful here, although it can have tactical merit!), by telling the world what a bunch of dumb-asses they are, OR to untangle things quickly and efficiently so that everyone can get on with their real jobs.

Try mostly for the second, harder, approach; the benefits last longer.

Your obvious priority, if the reporter has been arrested, assaulted or is in danger, is to get him or her out to safety. Don't delegate; lead this one yourself.

Spare no effort; spend the money; call in the IOUs and contacts to make it happen; roll in the lawyers. Hold arguments, explanations and recriminations for later.

Even as you're extracting your reporter you need to know exactly what happened and why, and assess it carefully. Is it a 100% clean-cut case of bad cops vs innocent reporter? Knowing this will shape your decision on whether to insist on a full reckoning and fuss your way (publicly?) all the way to the top, or to fold your cards, or to pull your reporter aside for a stern private lecture while you take it on the chin publicly.

TAKE NOTE

The right to freedom of expression and media

Section 16 of the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa:

(1) Everyone has the right to freedom of expression, which includes:
  (a) Freedom of the press and other media;
  (b) Freedom to receive or impart information or ideas;
  (c) Freedom of artistic creativity; and
  (d) Academic freedom and freedom of scientific research.

(2) The right in subsection (1) does not extend to
  (a) Propaganda for war;
  (b) Incitement of imminent violence; or
  (c) Advocacy of hatred that is based on race, ethnicity, gender or religion, and that constitutes incitement to cause harm.

The police have very detailed, and actually quite enlightened, internal rules for dealing with the media. Tap into Standing Order 156 (see below).

Written rules are fine, but police leadership's problem is getting officers on the scene to apply them.

It's up to you to make sure there's no similar problem in your newsroom.

- **Use the agreement:** The 1999 Record of Understanding with Sanef on how to deal with Section 205 issues. Read the full document in the appendix of this book, so you know how it can help. Also available on the Sanef website: www.sanef.org.za
- **Use the hotline:** Sanef secured agreement from the SAPS on April 25 2008 that in the event of arrests or harassment of journalists, editors should directly call Director Phuti Setati on 082 778 4312.

KNOW THE RULES

No, they may NOT take away your camera

Sparks can fly between police officers and reporters. Often, this is caused by a lack of knowledge – and application – of the written rules police have and the ethical standards journalists must uphold.

A little-known internal police document called "Standing Order No. 156 – Media Communication" spells out in detail over 27 pages exactly what SAPS members must do whenever they come into contact with journalists.

Compared to the repressive media relations regime applied by the apartheid-era police force, these regulations reflect – on paper, at least – a relatively enlightened, mostly transparent approach to the media. Knowing these rules is vital for reporters and editors.

Here are ten of the most interesting points in SO156:

- Journalists may ask any SAPS member for information and they are free to respond if the topic is in their field of expertise or responsibility, and it will not jeopardise police work. They don't have to respond if they don't want to, but then they must redirect the query to a designated media liaison official, who in turn must respond.
- Police officials must treat media politely and with respect "even when provoked".
- Even if actual publication of a photograph may need permission, no journalist may be stopped from taking pictures or video recordings.
- A reporter who interferes in a cordoned-off area should be asked, politely, to leave, or be "escorted" out if he/she refuses.
- Police may "under no circumstances" verbally or physically abuse journalists and no cameras or other equipment may be seized, unless this is destined to be an exhibit in court.
- Police may "under no circumstances whatsoever" wilfully damage the camera, film, recording or other equipment of a journalist.
- Police may not make "ill-considered, irresponsible, discriminatory statements or comments or use foul language".
- While they must maintain confidentiality on individual journalists' investigative or exclusive requests for information, police members are not allowed to exercise favouritism by giving news to one medium and not another.
- A section on national key points guarded by members says photographing or filming these may only be stopped – preferably after checking with senior ranks – if a criminal motive is reasonably suspected. And police should exercise discretion because some key points are also tourist attractions or places that generate media interest.
- Lastly, a detailed section on the infamous Section 205 disclose-your-sources-or-go-to-jail confirms a 1999 agreement ("Record of understanding") between Sanef and the government, that this should only be used as a proven last resort, and then only through the National Prosecuting Authority after obtaining a go-ahead from the national police commissioner.

AS I SEE IT

Ombud as internal conscience

George Claassen

Ombudsman on *Die Burger* since 2003

The establishment of an internal ombudsman system at media institutions only started to become part of the media landscape from the 1960s.

Since then the awareness has grown that the Fourth Estate cannot hold other parts of society responsible without in one way or the other being accountable to society itself.

Today the ombud development within the media is reflected in an international body, the Organisation of Ombudsmen (ONO), with more than 100 members worldwide.

The purpose of an ombud system within the media is to be accountable to consumers in practising ethical journalism.

Unethical journalism has seriously tarnished the reputation of the profession in recent years, for example in the US the Jayson Blair case at the *New York Times (*plagiarism and fabrication*)*, Stephen Glass at *The New Republic (*fabrication of stories and quotes*)*, Jack Kelley at *USA Today* (fabricated stories, exaggerated facts and plagiarism). There have also been many local plagiarism controversies.

In South Africa the system of self-regulation through the South African Press Council and Ombudsman and the Broadcasting Complaints Commission has probably diminished the role an internal ombudsman or reader's editor can play in the eyes of editors. That may be the reason that less than ten local newspapers have an ombud.

However, this is an over-simplication because numerous studies have shown that an internal ombud system, functioning through a sound ethical code, can drastically protect individual media against libel cases. It therefore makes sound financial sense to have an internal ombud.

An ombud acts as the internal conscience of the newspaper or other media. The ombud answers all complaints from the public and his or her direct contact information is published or announced daily or in every publication. If necessary, corrections or apologies are printed or broadcast without delay.

The ombud has an important role in interpreting the ethical code of a newspaper for its editorial staff. She or he works in close relationship with the editor: not only reactively after mistakes have been made and complaints have been received, but also proactively to warn about possible libel or unethical practices in planned reports.

Training of staff is therefore a vital part of the ombud's work, for example in making journalists aware of what plagiarism is and how to avoid it.

With the rapid growth of internet publishing, the challenges become bigger. Potential libel must be monitored even more closely because comments by readers on blogs can create havoc to a newspaper's bottom line.

To minimise harm is perhaps the most important function of the internal ombud.

DEFINITION

What does it mean?

An **ombudsman** (English plural: *ombudsmans* or *ombudsmen*) is an official ... who is charged with representing the interests of the public by investigating and addressing complaints reported by individual citizens. – *Wikipedia*

They are keeping us angels

Media in a democracy should be free to be a watchdog against the abuse of power – one of our many roles.

This is why in many democracies there is a belief that self-regulation is the best way to control abuses by the media of their freedom: being regulated by the government of the day could restrict that watchdog role, seeing as governments are often where abuses of power occur.

So the media prefer to be watchdogs over one another – and to increase credibility and trust they involve members of the public, and prominent legal minds, in the bodies they create to play that self-watchdog role. The profession draws up codes of conduct against which their actions and output can be publicly judged.

Media freedom is one aspect of freedom of expression. Freedom of expression is widely recognised as being central to democracy – but not as an absolute right. In our Constitution, it is guaranteed under section 16 but limited under section 36.

"Rights of free expression will have to be weighed up against many other rights, including the rights to equality, dignity, privacy, political campaigning, fair trial, economic activity, workplace democracy, property and most significantly the rights of children and women," as the code of conduct of the Broadcasting Complaints Commission states.

To make matters even more complex, media freedom also involves the public's right to be informed.

As the Press Code states: "The primary purpose of gathering and distributing news and opinion is to serve society by informing citizens and enabling them to make informed judgments on the issues of the time."

So self-regulation often involves a weighing-up of these opposing rights. Frequently, this simply comes down to whether reporting was accurate, fair and balanced.

Broadly, those who have complaints on media stories have three possible courses of action:

1. Complain directly to the editor or internal ombudsman.
2. More formally, lodge a complaint with the Broadcasting Complaints Commission or the Press Ombudsman – no costs involved, unless you choose to use a lawyer to do this.
3. Take the complaint to court – though it can be costly and time-consuming.

The strength of self-regulation rests on the support of the media.

As leaders in the media, editors can strengthen self-regulation by giving airtime or print space to making the public aware of our own self-regulatory bodies – and the decisions they make.

Press Council and Ombudsman: newspapers and magazines

Most people just want a quick correction of the facts, says Press Ombudsman Joe Thloloe. So as the editor of a print publication, you can best satisfy any complaining reader by acting quickly in deciding whether or not you feel you were at fault.

Of course, both you and all your staff need to be familiar with the SA Press Code so you can avoid violating it – and to argue your case if you feel unjustly accused. So print it out attractively and hang it on a wall in the newsroom, and invite the Ombudsman to speak to staff.

The Press Council explains on its website (**www.presscouncil.org.za**) that it, "the Press Ombudsman and the Press Appeals Panel are a self-regulatory mechanism set up by the print media to provide impartial, expeditious and cost-effective adjudication to settle disputes between newspapers and magazines, on the one hand, and members of the public, on the other, over the editorial content of publications.

"The mechanism is based on two pillars: a commitment to freedom of expression, including freedom of the press, and to excellence in journalistic practice and ethics.

"The Council has adopted the South

African Press Code to guide journalists in their daily practice of gathering and distributing news and opinion and to guide the Ombudsman and the Appeals Panel to reach decisions on complaints from the public. More than 640 publications, mainly members of Print Media South Africa, subscribe to the Code."

Readers have 14 days from publication to complain to the Ombudsman. Like most voluntary agreements around arbitration, the findings are final and may not be appealed against in court. Complainants can go straight to court if they are unhappy with this principle.

The Ombudsman's first step on receiving a complaint will be to try to resolve the issue informally – through the editor or the media house's internal ombudsman. If no agreement is reached, there will be a formal hearing and ruling. Finally, if one side does not agree with the ruling, it will go to the Press Appeals Panel.

If the Ombudsman rules for a complainant against the publication, the "sanction" usually involves publishing an apology plus the ruling of the Ombudsman – who will also lay down conditions such as how prominently this should be done.

Broadcasting Complaints Commission: radio and television

Complaints about broadcasters go to the Broadcasting Complaints Commission of South Africa (BCCSA), and must be made to the registrar within 30 days of the date of broadcast.

If as a broadcaster you are signed up with the BCCSA, you and your staff need to know the code that you have agreed to uphold.

Complaints about broadcasters usually fall into one of these categories: indecency, biased reporting, harmful to children, offensive, religious, violence or privacy and dignity.

The commission explains on its website (**www.bccsa.co.za**): "Upon acceptance of a complaint the registrar shall immediately notify the respondent in writing of the complaint. The respondent will receive a copy of the complaint and be required to supply a copy of the broadcast with comment on the complaint.

"The commission will then consider your complaint either at a hearing or adjudication at its discretion."

For an adjudication, the chairperson appoints a BCCSA member to try and reach a settlement or make a decision. This can be appealed against.

Hearings are done by a tribunal and are open to the public. Each side is entitled to put its case, and sanctions are imposed if the broadcaster is found to be at fault.

Sanctions usually involve broadcasting a "specifically worded explanatory and correcting statement", but sometimes may involve a fine.

The BCCSA handles court cases only slightly differently from the Press Council: "When at any stage of the proceedings, the chairperson is of the opinion that it is in the interest of fairness that a complainant must waive his or her rights to further legal recourse, the chairperson shall require the complainant to waive such rights. If a complaint deals with a matter already before a South African court the commission will not consider it." *– Elizabeth Barratt*

Dealing with critics

Snuki Zikalala
SABC Group executive of news and current affairs

Editors need strong nerves and a thick skin, especially if you work for a public service broadcaster in which everyone has a stake.

As SABC's Group executive of news and current affairs, and probably the most cartooned and criticised editor, I encounter many critics.

After every news bulletin, I can expect a phone call from a businessperson, politician or member of civil society. Some are polite about our coverage, others abusive. But I keep calm and ensure that what was reported is accurate and balanced.

However, you do bleed when you are stabbed in the back by colleagues, even though externally you keep up a brave face and do not lose focus.

"Don't ever believe what you read in newspapers," is what I always say to myself. But I also often wonder what I have done to my colleagues that there is so much malice and hatred.

Some media houses stop at nothing to discredit a colleague unfairly. It has to do with ideological warfare, as well as a battle for audiences and the small cake of advertising.

I used to call the editors to tell them that no one had even called me to verify or balance the story, but would receive the same answer: "I trust my reporter."

Some editors refuse to retract or give you the right to reply to a story that undermines your integrity. In order for us to return to ethical and respectful journalism, such editors must be sued – and they should also sue if they are defamed.

You develop a thick skin towards the critics if you genuinely know that what has been written and said about you has no basis.

My conviction, passion and dedication towards developmental journalism makes me fearless of critics who thrive on reporting negativity and sensationally for profits. I do not encourage sunshine journalism, but support critical, ethical journalism that strives to change South African society for the better.

Making a difference in people's lives on a daily basis makes me proud and satisfied when I leave for home in the evening. It's what keeps me going.

Development/developmental journalism

In the Third World, particularly in Africa, there has been a reaction against the detached and critical role of journalism. The argument is that media should, instead, actively promote national development.

"Development journalism" in this ethos is not just another beat like business or motoring – conventional reportage of a given topic. It is both about and for development

Sometimes "developmental" journalism is used to describe the spreading of government-oriented information about development, while "development" journalism is used to describe the media's independent evaluation of development programmes – at other times authors use these terms interchangeably.

For some, the aim of the development/al journalist is to explain development processes in simple terms to less literate citizens, identify possible solutions and help people to develop themselves and their communities. Here, reflecting grassroots voices is primary.

AS I SEE IT

Editors as writers

John Conyngham
Editor of *The Witness*

Should editors write? Yes, and no. For someone like me, torn between the buzz of journalism and the silence of literature, reconciling these sides of my nature is an ongoing challenge.

Few editors nowadays have time to escape from the relentless routines of editorship and management in order to write something creative, cogent and coherent. At best, most of us steal a few moments to point leader writers in a particular direction.

From time to time, over the years, I have written fortnightly columns although I realise with hindsight that my choice of subjects – like reflections on Auschwitz, studies of colonial meltdowns in Algeria, Ireland and Zimbabwe, and tributes to Pieter Pieterse and Bhambatha kaMancinza Zondi – is not the usual fare of editors, who tend to stick to politics.

Ideally, the position of editor should have a mystique. He or she must be the presence behind a paper or station, a steadying hand on the controls.

Editors should at all costs avoid over-exposure, as there is nothing more irritating than seeing endless photographs or footage of them at social gatherings, handing out awards or blowing their paper's trumpet. But equally, when the going gets tough, usually to do with the abuse of power, an editor must emerge from the shadows and speak up with authority.

I last took such a stand a year ago when certain politicians in their blue-light cavalcades began endangering other motorists.

In a front-page leader, signed "The Editor", I admonished the culprits and reminded them that they were just ordinary citizens elected temporarily to positions of authority, and should behave like responsible adults. They responded angrily. The premier summonsed the province's editors to the provincial council chamber where all the MECs took turns in castigating us. But behind their bravado, the bullies capitulated: *The Witness* newsroom no longer gets readers' phone calls about official road hogs.

Having drawn a line, an editor should then step back into the shadows until another battle looms. Then it's out with a pen and back into action.

DEFINITIONS

In any of these cases, the journalist or media takes a stance. That's where it gets tricky. It means adopting a particular view of what "development" is (which can be sensitive to issues like gender or environment, or can put job-creation – without regard to costs – as the paramount issue.). Taking a stance also can mean alignment with an economic theory and policy as "correct", or reflecting what government is doing, or expert views in the "development industry", or grassroots concerns.

It's tough for mainstream "development/al" journalism to steer between propaganda and acting like community media. Advocates of this model also need to keep the journalism distinctive – eg on HIV-Aids – so as not to blur the lines with broader "communication for development" which relies on modes such as purposive messaging, social marketing and edutainment.

But, being pro-development does not mean independence is wholly impossible.

When to listen to lawyers

Gilbert Marcus
Advocate

Lawyers are not editors and editors should not allow lawyers to take editorial decisions.

The role of lawyers is to give advice concerning the risks of publication or the consequences flowing from material already published. Ultimate decisions, especially relating to what can be published, should be taken by editors but with full knowledge of the attendant legal risks.

The most pressing threats to newspapers are suits for defamation and compulsion to disclose sources of information, usually by way of subpoena under Section 205 of the Criminal Procedure Act.

Where a proposed article defames a person or discloses the commission or suspected commission of a crime, there is an obvious need for caution. Journalists should be carefully questioned by their editors concerning the accuracy of their allegations and the reliability of their source, and whether or not the facts can and have been independently corroborated.

Disclosure of a source can arise in the realm of defamation where a newspaper relies on the defence of reasonable publication.[1] One of the factors going to reasonableness is the source of the information.

Similar problems arise in the context of Section 205 of the Criminal Procedure Act. Here, however, the issue concerns the journalist's possession of information about the commission or suspected commission of a criminal offence. The consequence of an unlawful refusal to answer questions in an inquiry under Section 205 may be imprisonment, whereas the refusal to disclose a source in a defamation suit may result in the failure of the defence of reasonable publication and ultimately the payment of damages.

Generally, the safest course is to publish only matter which is verifiably accurate. Truth tends to be the best defence in most situations, although it will not always avail in cases involving publication of private or confidential information.

While protecting the confidentiality of sources is an article of faith for journalists, the law does not see the issue in the same light. Where possible, therefore, information should be verified by sources who do not seek anonymity.

Where possible, editors should avoid resolving disputes in courts of law. Legal

Sanef editors protest outside the Cape High Court in 2001, in support of *Die Burger* editor Arrie Rossouw who had applied for the withdrawal of a search warrant.

MY EXPERIENCE

proceedings can be, and usually are, protracted and costly. When served with a Section 205 subpoena, editors should immediately invoke the 1999 agreement between Sanef and the department of justice and National Prosecuting Authority, and seek to resolve the problem.

If this proves impossible, the editor and journalist will be faced with difficult choices. It may be contended that the journalist has a "just excuse" for refusing to answer questions.[2] Should the journalist be found not to have a "just excuse", he or she may be liable to imprisonment.

Defamation suits are usually preceded by a letter of demand. Most people who have been defamed want nothing more than the record promptly and prominently set straight.

Where the newspaper is vulnerable to a claim for defamation, therefore, the best course is to seek to resolve the matter by a correction, an apology (if appropriate and required), or affording a reasonable right of reply. If this fails, resolution by the Press Ombudsman is preferable to a costly legal battle.

Footnotes:

1 This defence was recognised in National Media Limited and others v Bogoshi 1998 (4) SA 1196 (SCA). This decision recognises that there are circumstances in which a newspaper may publish false defamatory matter if, in all the circumstances, it is reasonable to do so.

2 There is no closed list of circumstances which may constitute a "just excuse" for a refusal to testify. In Attorney-General, Transvaal v Kader 1991 (4) SA 727 (A) it was held that it would amount to a just excuse "if a witness were to find himself in circumstances in which it would be humanly intolerable to have to testify". This case must now be considered also in the light of the constitutional guarantee of freedom of expression.

"Free speech must always be 'a very good thing' whether or not it causes trouble. I do not believe the media can do its job properly without causing trouble. Not infrequently, though, the trouble it causes lands it in hot water."

– Justice Pius Langa, Chief Justice

Catching flak on health at Frere

Phylicia Oppelt
Editor of the *Daily Dispatch*

Those of us who sit down at morning conference at the *Daily Dispatch* in East London could never have imagined that an impromptu brainstorming session around a single-source story would eventually transform itself into a national issue.

When we met in May 2007 to discuss the diary for the following day's newspaper, the news editor mentioned a woman who had lost her baby during birth at Frere Hospital's maternity unit.

The story was tragic and the reasons unclear, but it remained an unremarkable diary item until another manager mentioned her friend, who had given birth at Frere a short while before and whose placenta had dropped out on her kitchen floor a week later. Other managers then mentioned incidences of stillbirths and botched births.

That is when my deputy, Andrew Trench, and I realised that something far greater was at play; that there was something amiss at Frere, the feeder hospital for a vast geographical area in the eastern half of the Eastern Cape.

We set up an investigations team: Ntando Makhubu, our health reporter; Chandre Prince, our court reporter with an excellent nose for human interest stories; and Brett Horner, a senior reporter. They were taken off diary – a huge sacrifice for a small paper.

Prince and Makhubu were assigned the mothers and medical staff at the maternity unit while Horner contacted as many former employees as possible.


Daily Dispatch

Why Frere's babies die

SPECIAL REPORT TEAM

Exhausted staff, lack of equipment – most deaths were avoidable

Two weeks later, we realised the story was far bigger than we had anticipated. Until then, it had been managed by the newsdesk. Now we decided that Trench would direct the investigation, and the story slowly began taking shape.

He spent time sifting through the information as the team returned from interviews, and involved our graphic artist and photographic editor to ensure a complete package would evolve. We brought in a hidden camera for Prince and Makhubu as they freely walked the halls of Frere's maternity unit.

We had our stories ready 10 days before we decided to publish. From our previous encounters with the Eastern Cape department of health, we knew the denials would flow as soon as we published. And so we accuracy-checked each story – that would form part of the package – to death. We gave the department a week to respond. Eventually, they placed a R46 000 advertisement in our own paper on the same day of publication to rebut our "Why Frere's babies die".

We had done pre-publication publicity in our circulation area and had


Daily Dispatch

A mother's pain


Saturday Dispatch

Now a probe into Frere baby deaths


Daily Dispatch

Frere a 'national emergency'


Daily Dispatch

ANC leaders to quiz MEC Jajula on Frere baby deaths


Daily Dispatch

Sack provincial Health MEC now, demands labour boss


Daily Dispatch

Roebert speaks out

Top nurse under fire

arranged for one of the reporters to be interviewed by Jeremy Maggs on his morning SAfm programme. From there, invitations arrived for media participation, particularly radio programmes as well as a Carte Blanche insert. The investigations team, Trench and I participated.

None of us expected the political reaction: from Health Minister Manto Tshabalala-Msimang flying out to East London and setting up a task team, to her former deputy Nosizizwe Madlala-Routledge declaring Frere a national emergency.

Certainly, I did not expect President Thabo Mbeki's Friday ANC Online newsletter to be devoted to us and the subsequent ANC attack on my integrity.

But the support was there. Other media outlets spoke of the solid, old-fashioned journalism that we had practiced. Internally, within Avusa, there was similar support.

Ironically, the government's criticism of the *Daily Dispatch* and its reporting helped shape us as a newspaper. The Frere investigation has become the yardstick of the work that we want to do: in terms of tenacity, solid work underpinned by meticulous attention to detail and making sacrifices on a relatively small paper with limited resources.

Of course, we still keep an eye on Frere. We recently returned to the maternity section and found an amazing turnaround that stemmed from the reforms the health minister announced after our exposé.

For this reason, looking back a year to that news conference in May, there is little I would do differently.

Bringing together the news and views

Some editors are public figures, some prefer to be private. But all play a prominent role in regard to public opinion, even when behind the scenes.

In media theory, editors are pre-eminent shapers of what happens in the "public sphere" – a metaphor coined by philosopher Jurgen Habermas. This is that realm of life that brings together a range of news and views, thereby helping to set the scene for what people think is important and framing their horizons more broadly.

Public sphere and hot topics

An effective "public sphere" sets the bounds of what is permissible over a period. Some behaviours are stigmatised, and some legitimised, in terms of how moral compasses point in the public sphere at a given point in time. For instance, a "public sphere" can create a climate that tolerates minor corruption and law-breaking, or legitimises a particular economic policy, or challenges notions that women are secondary to men.

A strong "public sphere" creates an agenda list of hot topics for discussion, debate and action.

For instance, government, business and other actors – and the rest of the media – can be drawn into responding to issues like gangs at schools, tik addiction or sports ethics.

For a democracy, you need a vibrant

Some definitions: getting interested

"Public interest" is usually meant to be wider than "national interest".

Sometimes the two claims can compete with each other: for example, over whether state secrecy on a given issue genuinely meets both tests. What they share is that both phases are understood to imply a higher concern than individual or popular judgements.

Certainly, there is a distinction between "**what the public is interested in**" (mass subjectivity) and "public interest" (a concept designating an objective benefit that transcends mass appeal).

The "public interest" is generally seen as a judgement about whether something is in the "greater good of a society taken as a whole". The **SA Constitution's** section 192 recognises the concept of the "public interest", but does not spell it out.

"National interest" is properly counterposed to "foreign interests" – those of other nation states – although sometimes the two can coincide (for example on trade or peacekeeping). SABC policies tend to take a wider view of "national interest" than just its international dimension, and interpret the concept instead in terms of building a South African nation.

In this view, national interest is interpreted in terms of the Constitution's focus on promotion of human dignity, non-racialism, non-sexism, supremacy of the constitution and the rule of law, universal adult suffrage, regular elections and a multi-party system of government. The 2003 broadcasting law commits the SABC to advancing both the public and the national interests, but without spelling these out explicitly.

Counterposed to both "public" and "national" interests are **"private interests"** – referring to the interests of each individual, for example in personal privacy and dignity. It is widely accepted that there is a stronger case for public interest overriding these individual interests in regard to people who are willingly public figures like politicians.

At the same time, exposing the private affairs of public figures still needs a rationale – is the information really relevant to their public role? Often, sources will opportunistically promote their private interests by presenting the coverage or suppression of stories as something that is in the public interest. That they stand to benefit in particular does not, however, intrinsically disqualify the sought-

"public sphere" – with voices coming from government, business, civil society and individuals of all walks of life (and not least poor people normally outside the media loop).

When a single sectoral voice predominates, like that of whites or men or government, then you have an elitist and limited public sphere.

Dynamism

Having a wide spread of news and views in the "public sphere" is something to be measured across the media as a whole sector.

Dynamism means there does not have to be a rigid proportional reflection of society at any given point in time. In fact, editors can enrich democracy when new, young, minority or dissident voices are advantaged beyond the size of their initial base.

It's the opposite principle to reporting on political parties according to a static reflection of previous voting patterns. Such "representative" formulae provide little impetus to debate, nor do they improve upon the ideas that dominate at a given point.

Beliefs vs media

Social progress and renewal is partly a function of contradictions between the ratio of beliefs on the ground, and how they find expression in the media.

- Too much difference, and the media

SPELLING IT OUT

after action from also being something in the greater public interest. However, best practice editing would promote transparency around the dual benefits, and be very clear on how the wider interest would indeed be served.

There are often **criticisms** of how the concepts are invoked.

"Public interest" is sometimes seen as being used to justify decisions that are in the corporate interests of the media seeking to draw audiences, and not much else;

"National interest" is regarded with suspicion because governments like to define it, and in ways that promote their particular interest in staying in power. They see themselves as representing the majority, and thereby equate their interests with that of the nation (or large part of it).

The **codes of conduct** of both the Press Council and the Broadcasting Complaints Commission of South Africa make reference to "public interest", but without spelling it out. But in the UK, the 2004 Editors' Code of Practice, ratified by the Press Complaints Commission, elaborates that:

1. The public interest includes, but is not confined to:
   i) Detecting or exposing crime or serious impropriety.
   ii) Protecting public health and safety.
   iii) Preventing the public from being misled by an action or statement of an individual or organisation.
2. There is a public interest in freedom of expression itself.

The code adds that whenever the public interest is invoked, editors should be able to **demonstrate fully** how it was served.

The full code can be found at www.pcc.org.uk/cop/cop.asp

Whatever an editor's gut feel about "public interest", the point is that you often need to draw on the notion in order to make decisions. It's a helpful yardstick, albeit capable of many interpretations.

Think through your own interpretation in making tough decisions, because you may well want to **justify it** to your audience – or even have to do so to critics or a court.

This suggests that you elaborate your thinking before you instinctively decide to cry "public interest".

Use the concept with insufficient care, and people will question your sincerity.

– Guy Berger

gets out of sync with the society.

- Too little difference, and standing ideas lack any serious challenge, testing or change.

Editors who want to enrich the "public sphere" have to operate a balance that works for their operation.

Within "public sphere" thinking, there is no requirement for any single media house to itself aspire to be a comprehensive forum – unless, however, it is a public service broadcaster, or a publication owned by the public through the state.

In these latter cases, there is a legal obligation to be widely representative, especially featuring political parties in election periods.

But for most private media, there is the freedom to adopt positions – although even here, basic ethics, such as reflecting the views of other sides, should still prevail.

Interest groups

In practice, much journalism in the private sector serves special interest groups – linguistic or class, for instance, or an effective lobby group like the Treatment Action Committee. That's life in the reactive fast lane.

But in contrast, specific instances of public service journalism – in whatever medium, public or private – entail covering the waterfront of voices in a way that's balanced. The range of voices, even

Surviving religious pressures

Cyril Madlala
Editor of *UmAfrika*

When we revived *UmAfrika* in 2001, it was reasonable to expect overwhelming support from the large family that is the Roman Catholic Church. After all, the newspaper had been established by missionaries as an instrument to spread the Good News.

Sadly, it had been liquidated when the church could no longer sustain it and funding from overseas dried up as South Africa overcame apartheid and became a normal society.

We calculated that the brand remained powerful. Not only was it instantly recognisable as a Roman Catholic newspaper but during the turbulent 1980s and 1990s, when the province was burning, the newspaper became a powerful medium that told the story of the rise of the Mass Democratic Movement and life-and-death struggles in the face of the vicious system of apartheid.

All that was forgotten when freedom dawned.

The comrades took charge of the public broadcaster. The commercial newspapers, which had largely been complicit in the perpetuation of apartheid by doing the barest minimum to oppose it, fell over each other to endear themselves to the liberation movement.

Vrye Weekblad, *South*, *New Nation*, *Saamstaan* and *UmAfrika*, which had been alternative voices, had outlived their usefulness to the comrades.

The strategy then, when we revived *UmAfrika*, was to appeal to the leadership of the Catholic Church in KwaZulu-Natal to endorse the product, and encourage the millions that follow the faith to buy the newspaper.

In return, a specified amount of space would be dedicated to matters of religion, including a sermon. We would not advertise guns or sex services.

Fortunately, there was already a pop-

if unpalatable to some, should be accommodated for "fairness".

Leadership role

Understanding all this puts editors in prime place to be mindful of their role as public intellectuals.

Your leadership shapes much of the content that filters into national consciousness.

Although people often talk about "the public" as if that body exists, indeed was always already out there, it is in fact your medium's discourse that helps constitute particular publics and their "public opinion(s)".

What's critical is that editors resist spin and pressure by governments and powerful publics who seek to dominate discourse within the broad public sphere.

It is the case that sometimes the media inherently tail behind political forces who set the agenda (for example the scrapping of the Scorpions).

At other times, the public leads (for example through xenophobic attacks, or civil society actions).

The task for editors is to add different views, including your own judgement and values, to the mix.

Contribute to the circuit of impact; don't only respond to it.

Position yourself in the "public sphere", and you can see the bigger picture about where your decisions fit into democracy. – *Guy Berger*

HOW WE DID IT

ular priest whose radio sermons inspired thousands, including non-Catholics, to flock to gatherings whenever he was billed to preach. He was an instant success, and many of our readers cited him as a drawcard.

In the middle of all that, when the association with the church was beginning to yield returns as a marketing strategy, all hell broke loose. The sex scandal involving priests in the US hit world headlines. The church was paying hefty sums to settle claims from victims.

Naturally, or so we thought, as a newspaper we had to let our readers know what was happening elsewhere, particularly because of our association with the church.

Our readers flooded us with their own experiences. We published a few choice ones.

The response was prompt. Parish after parish informed us the priest in charge was so disgusted they would cancel forthwith all *UmAfrika* deliveries. Other priests used their pulpits to warn worshippers to desist from buying our newspaper.

The worst was yet to come.

We published a letter from a reader who alleged he had been molested by our own star attraction – the popular priest!

The authorities suspended him and deprived him of privileges as a priest. He was so overwhelmed by depression he was found dead, hanging from a tree. He left a note, saying he could take it no more.

Nobody has said as much to us as *UmAfrika* – but as editor at times I wonder if the man's blood is not on my hands.

No doubt, it was a damn good story. It shook the faith of many when they learnt that so powerful a preacher, who had always uplifted them spiritually, had so much evil under his cassock.

He had been a magnet for our readers. As a business strategy to market the paper, we could not have had a better salesman.

But dead salesmen generate no revenues, even if editors felt it was in the public interest to publish.

Representing the enterprise

Peter Sullivan

Group editor-in-chief of Independent Newspapers in SA

I keep a list of my duties. "Always acknowledge the customer first; if you see anyone lurking outside the restaura ..." oh, sorry, that's the Waiter's Training List provided by her employer for my daughter.

There's not that much difference, really.

Like any good waiter, my job is to satisfy customers. There is a menu of things I do, which makes a case study difficult: like choosing a single item from a diverse menu. So, unsatisfying as it may be, here are some of my job's menu choices. And some customers.

Sometimes customers are singles like an irate subscriber (amazingly, every one that phones has been a subscriber "for 30 years"), sometimes huge advertisers like Woolworths, or industry bodies like Print Media SA.

Sometimes my duty is to satisfy demands from the larger organisations on which I serve (because of my position, not my sparkling personality) like the International Media Council of the World Economic Forum (WEF) or the advisory Council of South African

Hearing readers' complaints

Gavin Stewart

Writer and former editor of the *Daily Dispatch*

Two successive editorial secretaries did service in the 12 years I was at the *Daily Dispatch*.

The first had been schooled to pass only selected calls to the editor, which naturally excluded all angry and offensive people. The editor's life was blissful and ignorant.

The next secretary had been housekeeper at a Holiday Inn where complaining guests were referred directly to the manager. Life was interrupted irregularly and not always pleasantly, rather like driving at speed with your head out of the window: not comfortable or safe, but revitalising.

It was also highly informative.

And it occurred to me that if the person in charge is too busy or too important to hear what the people we write about, and for, think of our publication, something is wrong with the publication.

Most of the readers who complained wanted to be heard and acknowledged by the person supposedly in charge. That was often enough.

It meant complaints were investigated on the same day and, when necessary, a for-the-record published promptly "with due prominence". Easing anybody's pain eases their desire to hurt you, which is a good idea.

If the complainer did not find this satisfactory I suggested going to the Press Ombudsman – which is much quicker and less costly for both sides than going to law.

If the *New York Times* and *Washington Post* can publish corrections prominently and honestly, so can we all. I made a fetish of corrections and there still weren't many.

MY EXPERIENCE

Chambers of Commerce and Industry (SACCI).

I lecture South Africa's future generals on how to deal with the media, try to write analytical pieces on politics, media, economics, birds and books, and represent the company at fora (or forums) when required.

Great sometimes, jetting to Valencia to talk about the media's role in making Shosholoza's entry into the America's Cup a success. (Independent won an award there, for good reporting.)

There are other enjoyable aspects of a largely administrative position.

These include representing Independent Newspapers (via the Print Media Association) as chair of the Press Freedom Committee and sitting as a judge on two committees serving the Advertising Standards Association, where we hear allegations of skullduggery from the public and from competitors about ads considered illegal, in bad taste or simply in conflict with the prescribed code.

I am the Independent group's ombudsman and serve on eight charities, from one which buys expensive instruments for underprivileged orchestras to The Star Seaside fund, which has sent over 120 000 children on a ten-day holiday to the sea.

Of all the people I serve, these children are my most delightful – and easily satisfied – customers.

HOW I SEE IT

NEWS & OPINION

August 24 2008

Press Ombudsman's panel finds the Sunday Times in breach of Press Code

MR Allan Mukoki, former CEO of the Land Bank, lodged two complaints with the Press Ombudsman against the Sunday Times for stories it carried on November 11 2007 and January 20 2008, headlined "How fat cats looted bank billions" and "Land Bank boss 'must be charged'".

The matter was heard by a panel consisting of Press Ombudsman Joe Thloloe, and Press Appeals Panel members Ronnie Tsiroq (public representative) and Peter Mann (press representative).

The panel deliberated on this matter against the backdrop of an important time line that started with the government issuing a statement on November 8 2007 about the Deloitte forensic audit into the financial management of the Land Bank, and announcing that the final report was being referred to the South African Police Service and the National Directorate of Public Prosecutions for further investigation, and that criminal proceedings against all those who were identified in the report as having personal interest acted inappropriately and negligently be instituted.

At its final meeting for 2007, on December 5, cabinet announced it had rescinded its earlier decision to hand over the forensic report to the police and the prosecuting authorities, pending further internal investigations by the minister of agriculture and land affairs. At a press conference the following day, a government spokesman said it was rescinded as some members of the board and some members of the executive had come forward with new information that had not been considered by the forensic auditors.

When the Sunday Times wrote the November story, it had not seen a copy of the report, but it had pieced the story together after interviews with a number of sources, including two employees of the Land Bank, employees in the Department of Agriculture, and members of the Directorate of Public Prosecutions and the complainant.

At the time that the newspaper wrote the first story, the government had accepted and was acting on the report, and it was reasonable for the Sunday Times to report on and even quote from it. The panel, however, finds that the newspaper did not exercise sufficient care in dealing with the contents of the report.

The headline "How fat cats looted Land Bank billions" assumes that it is true that some people "looted" – strong verb – Land Bank billions. The subheading "Cabinet calls for criminal charges after R2-billion is siphoned off to fund associates' business schemes" also assumes that R2-billion was "siphoned off".

The lead paragraph states as fact that top Land Bank officials siphoned off more than R2-billion meant for farmers, to fund their close friends and business associates' luxury golf estates, a sugar mill, equestrian estates and residential developments.

Good practice in journalism is to treat allegations as just that until they are proved to be true in a court of law.

The findings and conclusions of forensic auditors would be led as evidence in court, if it was appropriate, and the auditors would be cross-examined to test their evidence. The auditor's word is not gospel.

We applied journalistic yardsticks and were convinced that if the Sunday Times had reported on the contents but treated allegations with caution, it would not have led to the sensationalist tone in the story. It was hyped up unnecessarily.

The assumption of guilt is carried into the January story. Forty-five days after the government announced it had rescinded its decision to send the report to the police and the prosecuting authorities, the Sunday Times reported that the cabinet had withdrawn the report from the investigative agencies and had "referred it back to agriculture and land affairs minister Lulu Xingwana for 'internal investigation'".

The Land Bank story was important for the Sunday Times and as it should have covered the government's December conference.

When the November story states that "The audit revealed that ..." it continues to accept the findings of the auditors as fact, even before they are tested in a court.

Our main finding is that the Sunday Times is in breach of clause 1.3 of the South African Press Code that states: "Where a report is not based on facts or is founded on opinion, allegations, rumour or supposition, it shall be presented in such a manner to indicate this clearly."

Because of the complexity of the matter, the Sunday Times was ordered to publish this abbreviated version of the ruling.

For the detailed ruling with itemised findings on various elements of the complaint visit www.presscouncil.org.za

● The Press Appeals Panel headed by Judge Ralph Z... man, heard Mr Mukoki's ... peal against the ruling. It ... held the Ombudsman's fi... ings but further ordered t... the newspaper should h... explained more clearly ... use of the word "fraud" in ... forensic report – that it ... lated to the withholding ... legal opinions suggesting ... some Land Bank transact... contravened the bank's ... date.

The Appeals Panel ... found that the newspaper ... incorrect in claiming on ... uary 19 that the auditors ... ommended criminal cha... of dishonesty and breac... duty be laid against ... officials. The recommen... tion was for disciplin... action on these counts. ... panel ordered the newsp... to correct this ... Ombudsman

YOU CAN WIN R100 000 IF YOU TAKE THE TEST

When the ombudsman tells you to publish an apology to readers, you have to do it.

I cannot find a case where a correction was published and the aggrieved party still sued – but there are cases where the failure to correct information exacerbated the defamations and increased the damages.

Free to fly – for a greater purpose

"Everyone has the right to freedom of expression, which includes freedom of the press and other media." (SA Constitution, Bill of Rights, Section 16)

Mention the "First Amendment" in the US, and many people will know what you're talking about. But refer to Section 16 of our constitution, and you'll get quizzical looks from most South Africans. Which means that editors should be promoting this critical constitutional right, big time.

Freedom of the media is derivative of freedom of expression, although it is also cited as a distinct freedom in the Constitution.

It's unusual for a sector of society to be singled out for constitutional protection. That our media is so recognised, reflects how the freedom granted this specific institution contributes to democracy in ways over and above individualised free speech.

Having freedom of expression in a society without media freedom would be like allowing individuals to vote but not letting them form political parties.

Views for democracy

Freedom of the media is not special privilege for the institution's own vested interests. It's a higher level of individual freedom, and media houses are entitled to exercise this freedom not just as a right for them, but also for a greater purpose – the necessity of unfettered news and communications for a vibrant democracy.

This thinking underpins Sanef's campaign to the South African public under the slogan "media freedom is your freedom". Unless our citizens are persuaded that it's worth cherishing media freedom, no constitutional protection on its own can preserve hard-won liberties.

Freedom, of course, is not absolute: the media still has to account to the laws of the land and also to the self-regulatory mechanisms to whose principles it subscribes.

That means tempering media freedom rights in relation to constitutional limits (such as hate speech or propaganda for war), and balancing the power of media speech with citizens' other rights – like dignity or privacy.

And, of course, within any media house, journalists are also not free to say whatever they like. Their freedom of speech is constrained by editorial policies

and procedures. The same also goes for editors.

But all principles and guidelines need interpretation, and therein lies much leeway.

To preserve their freedom in the grey areas, some editors think it's better to push the envelope, and to seek forgiveness rather than to ask permission.

Broadcast differences

There's also a difference for broadcast media whose use of finite airwaves incurs licence conditions appropriate to the use of this scarce public resource.

The obligations include issues like local content quotas, defined language requirements and political neutrality.

Other media (such as newspapers and websites) have no such character and are therefore without intrinsic need for statutory regulation. – *Guy Berger*

QUIZ

Pick your canine

Rank the following in terms of your democratic priorities for the roles of the media.

(At the same time, recognise that oscillating between them, in everyday practice, is the mark of a versatile editor.)

- ☐ Neutral and fair newshound.
- ☐ Mongrel that exhibits a wide range of content origins.
- ☐ Watchdog that is focused on exposing government abuses.
- ☐ Sniffer-dog finding ills committed by a wider range of players.
- ☐ Guide dog that educates, not just informs.
- ☐ Circus poodle that mostly aims to entertain.
- ☐ Guard dog which deliberately protects particular groups' interests – such as minorities, a specific language or city.
- ☐ Neighbourhood pooch that is close to one or more communities.

> "A goat tethered by a long rope may graze further than others, but it cannot be called free."
>
> – Tom Gawaya-Tegulle on the Ugandan press

Five overlapping roles to play

As an editor, do you consider the role of your media as being just to entertain, inform and make profits?

Or do you feel that you as an individual, and your media, also have special roles to play in promoting and building South Africa's new democracy? If so, here are some definitions to help you analyse how you are doing this.

Media independence

This is often seen as a pillar of democracy. As for every other institution and individual, this means having both rights and responsibilities. Media do influence democracy, in particular the two crucial factors of:

- Political competition – during and between elections.
- Participation – during and between elections.

Journalists not only observe, reflect and analyse people and events: their work influences these processes of political competiton and participation, which in turn ultimately feeds back to influence media freedom and independence.

Democracy is not a state of being, it is a continual process with feedback loops: the space for democratic growth has to be continually cleared.

On a philosophical level, can one ever say there is "enough" democracy? With historical hindsight, can one ever say that any democracy is so entrenched that it can never be lost again?

New democracies

In an "emerging" or new democracy, this process of democratisation is hopefully taking place. It is a time of crucial political change, out of which can quickly come increased democracy, entrenchment of democracy or a slide back to a less democratic state. History shows such varied changes – even a good constitution is no guarantee against back-sliding.

In some new democracies there is little media infrastructure, so the media start playing their democratising roles by co-operating on basic, practical issues like buying printing presses, setting up radio transmission equipment or raising funds to start a news agency, as well as working on the creation of regulatory and institutional frameworks.

South Africa has much of that infrastructure in place, so we sometimes forget that we are still at the beginning.

The SA media still need to provide mutual support to learn to promote democracy, build democratic space and improve the quality and independence of journalism – all three of which mostly did not exist under apartheid.

There are various democratising roles (see below); some media will concentrate on particular ones, while others will try to encompass all of them. Within one news bulletin, or one edition of a newspaper, each story may play different roles.

But it is not only about content – it is also what your medium does outside publishing or broadcasting.

Crucially, it is what you choose to do as an editor both in your newsroom and in the wider media sphere, which defines the roles you personally are playing in our democracy.

Definitions of roles

The democratising roles are not mutually exclusive: they are different practices which are all needed in order to promote democracy.

They also overlap one another:

1. **Liberal** – political watchdog.
2. **Social democratic** – guidedog, messenger and educator.
3. **Neo-liberal** – neutral referee or mirror of society.
4. **Participatory** – active promoter of democratic participation.
5. **Self-transformative** – improving and transforming journalism and the media environment.

In practice

Don't let these names put you off – have

a look at the kinds of practical actions that each of these encompasses.

1. LIBERAL ROLE

DESCRIPTIVE VERBS: Protect, defend, fight, champion, lobby.
ACTIONS: Guard citizens' rights and hold the powerful to account, especially the state. Publish news others do not want published. Uncover unacceptable activities in state and business. Hold office-bearers to account for performance of duties. Fight for transparency and access to information. Be a politically neutral watchdog, an adversary of those who abuse power and a champion of the people. Promote own rights and responsibilities, protect editorial independence. Uphold democratic principles and ethics in own work.

2. SOCIAL DEMOCRATIC ROLE

DESCRIPTIVE VERBS: Challenge, encourage, educate, enlighten, research, survey.
ACTIONS: Be neutral educator not political agent. Act as public steward, challenging the apathy of people. Encourage people to be informed and knowledgeable. Be a messenger. Enlighten the public so they can self-govern. Serve the developers, act as intermediaries between government and citizens. Highlight government policy, spread understanding and debate to draw public interest. Do political education regarding democratic principles and civil and political rights.

3. NEO-LIBERAL ROLE

DESCRIPTIVE VERBS: Reflect, debate, serve, disseminate, balance, monitor.
ACTIONS: Be a neutral referee or mirror of society, balanced and impartial. Serve democratic duty to diversity and pluralism. Provide platform for rational debate of a wide range of views. Disseminate diverse views as information to help the audience form opinions. Challenge prejudices and highlight alternatives. Service the political system by providing information, discussion and debate on public affairs. Set the news agenda, do not leave it to politicians to raise debates.

4. PARTICIPATORY ROLE

DESCRIPTIVE VERBS: Mobilise, advocate, question, involve.
ACTIONS: Be an active democratic player. Promote ongoing participation of civil society, including the non-elite and information-poor. Promote freedom of speech so public opinion is not just formed by elite. Promote existence of wider democratic community between elections. Promote public discussion to get democratic participation in policy-making. Contribute to creating a public sphere where civil society and government debate political/apolitical issues. Question government actions in this arena.

5. SELF-TRANSFORMATION ROLE

DESCRIPTIVE VERBS: learn/teach, encourage, negotiate, compromise, transform, unite, set ideals.
ACTIONS: Unite around shared concerns. Publicly fight for politically and economically independent journalism. Foster journalist solidarity and co-operation. Lobby against and redress own imbalances. Monitor own transformation status (race, gender). Debate diversity issues and democratic responsibilities. Promote media education and training. Strive for professional excellence. Award integrity. Hold workshops on media law/ethics/human rights/xenophobia/HIV/gender/poverty.

Editors have to succeed in the arena of media as business, especially if they work for the private media, so their work is judged internally against business ideals. However, on a national level editors represent the media as an institution in society, so their work is judged against ideals of journalism and of democracy.

– Elizabeth Barratt

(Drawn from "Choosing to be part of the story: the participation of the South African National Editors' Forum in the democratising process", MPhil thesis, 2006)

"That which I have seen,
that is what I say;
I will not say it with fear."

– Nigerian folk song, cited by Alfred Opubor, 2004

Bring in the changes – here's the theory

Some changes are gradual, like the slow migration of certain advertising to online. They need proactive and pre-emptive editorship styles. Some changes are sharp and crisis-shaped, like major budget cuts, calling for reactive flexibility. Other changes need vision, as when there are new ventures, re-positioning, special projects or different ways of working.

In the turbulent sea of competitive journalism, editors need to understand the deeper complexities of changes and how to bob above the turmoil, even sail somewhere on it. And sometimes be the change agent who stirs up the waves.

Times of change force editors to improve their competency to prioritise what should get attention.

When that change is open-ended, such as convergence scenarios, you have to be guided not so much by a vision of where things are going as by the foundational values from whence you came. That lodestone is something to hold aloft to help guide your decision-making about uncertainties.

Change entails:

- New things: learning, creating and/or adapting to them.
- Letting go of some existing practices, sometimes even people.
- Knowing what old things to keep.

Part of managing change is dealing with anxieties over balancing these three unavoidables.

According to Gill Geisler of the Poynter Institute, like it or not there are **five principles** you need to recognise:

a. Change happens; it will happen to you.
b. Change is not necessarily fair.
c. Change creates more work.
d. Change requires communication.
e. Change can be a time of renewal.

Plan for change

If you and your team are facing major change, set aside some dedicated time to think about the deeper dynamics involved. If you want an advanced grip, consider using the following planner:

1 Context: what is the top change most relevant to your current situation?

- Technology and convergence
- New reporting systems and accountability
- Change of faces (above or below)
- Cash squeeze or new budget targets
- Heightened competition
- A new editorial project
- Dumbing down or tabloidisation
- Racial and gender transformation
- New owners or political realignments that impact on you

Other..... .....

2 Position yourself to understand what's up

- Is the change permanent/temporary?
- Is it planned, or unforeseen?
- Symbolic or seriously substantive?
- What will stay constant?

3 Threats, opportunities or hybrid of both?

- Threat: "a bad thing":
- Change is pain, change hurts
- The impacts on your operation's knowledge base – eg causing uncertainty
- The impacts on your staff's emotions – eg creating fear
- Promise: "a good thing":
- Inertia is stifling – the "ain't broke, don't fix" ethos is an enemy of innovation and renewal
- Change can help avoid becoming the victim of other changes
- Keep both dimensions in mind and develop actions in regard to each.

4 How do you and others react to the major change at hand?

Positively, with enthusiasm, opportunity, challenge, excitement, new skills and knowledge, reward, fulfilment, survival, new start, new options, learning experience, motivating.

Negatively, with fear, anxiety, shock, distrust, anger, stress, unrealistic resentment, loss of self-esteem or identity, confusion, uncertainty, demotivation, loss of peer group network, letting go, saying goodbye, insomnia, conflict, politics, criticism, mutiny, high risk, resistance, misunderstanding.

Expect elements of both – even within yourself! Acknowledging them explicitly is key to addressing them.

(Adapted from: Liz Clarke, The Essence of Change, London: Prentice-Hall, 1994)

READ THESE

Quotes on change

Changing culture is a tall order in any organisation; experts say expect to give it three to five years of hard work.

□

It was the business literacy training session that many editors point to as an early turning point for increasing the level of conversation in the newsrooms around change.

□

... a new idea or change in routine might first be met by **opposition** from journalists. ("It would be stupid to do that.")

If that doesn't work, **perfectionism –** particularly as evidenced in an unrealistic commitment to flawless results – might kick it. ("We don't have time to do that.") In some environments, this perfectionism might even be the first response.

If there is still a beating pulse to the idea, it might encounter **passive resistance**. (" I will go through the motions, but my heart's not in it. This too will pass.").

Any of the three styles is equally effective at stopping a change initiative in its tracks.

□

When an entire workforce begins to take greater responsibility, day in and day out, for its own happiness, change is apparent.

– From Williams, V. 2007. *All eyes forward. How to help your newsroom get to where it wants to go faster.* The learning newsroom at the American Press Institute.

5 Understand resistance to change

Many people, even editors, resist change. Sometimes rightly so, even successfully so.

But when a change needs to be pushed ahead, it helps to think about why some people dig their heels in:

- Fear of the unknown
- Loss of control
- Not understanding reasons – lack of information
- Reluctance to let go
- Unexpected surprise
- Loss of face – indictment of existing and past efforts
- Fear of looking stupid
- Feeling vulnerable and exposed
- Threat to status and power base
- More and/or different work
- Lack of perceived benefits
- Threat to status.

The **four classic phases of reaction** to unwanted change – and suggested positive **responses** to them – are:

- **Disbelief, shock, denial:** ("it will soon be over") – Find and circulate facts; give people time.
- **Anger, depression, resistance** ("anger, blame, anxiety") – Listen and empathise.
- **Acceptance** (internalising), acknowledgement, letting go. – Help define, consolidate, support.
- **Adaptation and exploration** – Ideally embracing the change with commitment, developing ownership ("getting on board") Develop long-term goals, teams, rewards.

On-the-ball editors will promote a permanent culture of the last phase, there-

HANDY HINT

Add it up

Dis-satisfaction with status quo + Desirability of change + Practicality of change = Successful change

fore leapfrogging the earlier stages.

Putting it mathematically: successful change = the sum of dissatisfaction with status quo + desirability of change + practicality of change. Editors need to work at this till the bottom line of the equation is a value greater than the cost of changing.

(Adapted from Clarke)

How to deal with **resistance to change**:

- Talk and teach.
- Get people involved.
- Help others adjust.
- Negotiate to avoid major resistance.

But watch out:

- Manipulation and co-optation can lead to ill-feeling.
- Explicit and implicit coercion can arouse anger.

(From John P Kottler and Leonard A Schlesinger: Choosing strategies for change. Harvard Business Review, March-April, 1979)

6 How to cause change

Whether you start a change strategy with fireworks, or by stealth, the following fundamental steps have been identified by John P Kotter as important to take:

- Create a sense of urgency (realities, crisis)
- Form a powerful guiding coalition (team to lead)
- (Co-)Create the vision
- Communicate the vision
- Empower others to act on the vision
- Ensure short-term wins (visible improvements, rewards)
- Consolidate improvements (build on credibility)
- Institutionalise the new (compare it to the old, prepare for the next)

7 How to lead change

- Recognise the culture of the organisation
- Diagnose the situation – jointly
- Scenario plan: identify the optimum outcome, and list ways to get there
- Don't work uphill.
- Focus on the easiest areas
- Choreograph and celebrate success
- Be optimistic
- Compromise
- Manage myths and rumours
- Work on your integrity and trustability.

Along the way, it's clearly critical to have intelligence about progress or setback and initiate remedial action where necessary.

8 Putting principles into practice

- Define the human objects – and subjects – of the targeted change (can they be one and the same?)
- Assess the problem AND opportunity dimensions.
- Describe your best outcome scenario.
- Describe your worst outcome.
- What can you compromise on in the best outcome?
- Who is an obstacle to best outcome?
- How will the resisters react (cf four phases)? What can you do to get them through the early phases?
- Who is an ally for the best outcome? How can you synergise with them?
- Describe your first 3 communication steps in moving ahead.
- List 2 quick gains you can deliver.
- How will you consolidate and reinforce what you achieve?
- Specify a reward to give yourself for success in being Change Champion.

– Guy Berger

Cultivating newsroom culture

Workplace culture is made up of how employees relate to each other and the enterprise as whole.

It is fundamental to performance, impacting on staff satisfaction, motivation, teamwork and output quality. The culture of any given team is greater than the individual editor, but leadership style and power can help reinforce or change it. Leadership can make the difference between two models of culture.

TRADITIONAL NEWSROOM		LEARNING NEWSROOM
Information held by a few	☐	Information shared
Strategy is a secret	☐	Goals are well-known
Training is static	☐	Training is done to goals
Command/control styles	☐	Ideas flow bottom-up
Waits for a rescue	☐	Takes smart risks
Clings to old ways	☐	Anticipates change

(from Williams, V. 2007. All eyes forward. How to help your newsroom get to where it wants to go faster. The Learning Newsroom at the American Press Institute. p.14)

Do it yourself

To take stock of your workplace culture, locate it on this binary grid below (adapted from newsimproved.org). It is artificial in its extremes, and you may often have sub-cultures, differences between departments, or hybrid areas of the two poles. But *overall* does your shop lean one way or the other?

Ask them

You can easily research your newsroom's culture.

Draw some questions from what follows, or create your own, but make up a questionnaire to send out to staff, asking them to fill it in. You can make it anonymous, or you can ask for names – either way, give feedback to them when you've composited the results:

- List three things you feel are right about the newsroom.
- List three things you think are wrong and need to be fixed in the newsroom.
- If there was one thing you could change about the news department, what would it be?
- Do you have a clear idea of what is expected of you at work?
- Do you have an opportunity to grow in this news department?
- List the five most important things you think the editor needs to do over the next six months.
- What do we do better than our competitors?
- What do our competitors do better than we do?
- What is the biggest impediment to you personally doing your best work here?
- What would you like to know about the editor that you don't already know?
- What is your media house's news strategy?
- What are the roadblocks standing in the way of the media house being successful?

	Constructive culture	Defensive culture
Communication	Open and honest	Some voices dominate, others don't contribute
New ideas	Lots bubbling up	Conformity rules. Initiative is shot down, and/or people abdicate interest in making suggestions
Collaboration	Working in teams	Working in silos and defending turf; seeking to avoid blame.
Goals	Balance between detail and big picture priorities	Detail without big picture

- What is preventing you from being successful in your job?
- What phrase best describes our work environment:
  - Respectful and professional
  - Friendly and warm
  - Harsh and cold
  - Strained and frustrating
  - Challenging and stimulating
  - Demanding and overwhelming

(adapted from: Radio and Television News Directors Foundation)

Don't reject any staff responses, even if they implicate you in saying that the newsroom is far from having a constructive culture. Don't blame the questionnaire. Don't become passive or start rationalising the situation on the basis of limited resources and scope for change.

In the end, you'll only avoid thinking about the necessary changes.

Cultural nuance

Management experts typically identify three types of organisational cultures:

- Constructive (good)
- Passive-defensive (bad)
- Aggressive-defensive (worst).

These different options may suit diverse kinds of organisations, but in an era of massive communications change, media should lean towards the first.

This is because in a constructive newsroom culture, people are more likely to:

- Take initiative and responsibility at all levels.
- Enjoy brainstorming and trying new things.
- Learn even from failed experiments.
- Be open to change.
- Feel their potential is being realised.
- Grow, learn and stay with the company.

A constructive culture depends on three things: participation by employees in decision-making, open communication, and transparency.

(adapted from: News, Improved: Learning to Change. From a New Book by Michele McLellan and Tim Porter, 2008)

Understanding negative cultures

In 2000, the Readership Institute at Northwestern University found that that all but a handful of 90 American papers had defensive cultures.

The research noted striking similarities between many newspapers and military units in this regard.

In both:

- People worked in a top-down environment, competed with peers, were risk averse and focused one-sidedly on personal performance rather than overall goals.
- Managers rarely caught employees doing things right, but never missed when they did things wrong.
- Unresolved conflict and turnover were common.

Defensive journalistic culture emerged in an industrial age of mass media production.

Experts say it takes an aggressive-defensive form, and that the dominant style is perfectionism. People are expected to avoid all mistakes, keep track of everything and work long hours to meet narrow objectives.

Another aspect is that this culture is oppositional – which entails much mistake-finding and confrontation, such as between old-style kick-butt news editors and reporters.

The model has some benefits, not least because it has worked for more than a century. Some oppositional behaviour can be useful in a newsroom. There is a reason for perfectionism.

But many feel the model as a whole inhibits people from taking chances, leads to issues avoidance, and that it is stuck with a focus on flaws rather than solutions.

The research by the Readership Institute in the US found a huge gap between the prevalent culture and the ideal (constructive) one.

The key shortfalls were in giving positive feedback and encouragement, and assisting colleagues to think uniquely, develop and enjoy their work.

– Guy Berger

Focus on the field officers!

If you want results from the foot-soldiers of journalism – your reporters – put resources into those who directly manage this rank.

That's the strategic focus – loud and clear – emerging from research commissioned by the South African National Editors' Forum (Sanef).

The forum began with a study in 2002 to investigate problems at the junior reporter level about skills and attitudes. (www.sanef.org.za/skills_audit/phase_1/) That research emphatically confirmed that most reporters had:

- Paltry general knowledge, inferior interviewing skills and low ability to use language.
- Weaknesses in media law, and were uninformed in terms of media ethics, poor at newsgathering and writing skills, and unconcerned about accuracy.
- Inadequacies in their coverage of HIV/Aids and race, and low commitment to the profession.

If these were the "*what*" about the challenges in generating quality journalism, the bigger issue was "*why*" this troubling picture existed.

Among the several causes, one important factor was pinpointed: the quality of the direct line management of the junior journalists.

Following this up, Sanef in 2005 surveyed news editors around the country, and found that:

- Two in every five of the frontline news managers had less than three years' journalistic experience. This inexperience affected their confidence in managing reporters – who in turn had a very low opinion of their bosses' skills to do so.
- Reporters complained that new managers failed to brief and debrief them, and to give career advice. The managers in turn said they were too busy due to pressures of deadlines and that they had to tread carefully because of reporters' over-sensitivity.
- Internal communications in newsrooms were poor, and exacerbated by the fact that 70% of the news managers surveyed had either English or Afrikaans as a home language. The reporters studied (half of whom spoke an indigenous African language) saw their bosses as unwilling to deal with diversity.
- While the news managers put "team work" at the bottom of a list of areas where they needed development, reporters cited this as the biggest need for their supervisors.

The picture was one of news editors under pressure from the bottom, but also lacking support from the top. Many senior editors seemed to lack awareness of the problems experienced by middle editorial managers.

The solution, proposes the Sanef study, is for the top echelon to get more involved in coaching and mentoring their news managers.

Editors themselves are under huge pressures, but they need to do this – or continue to suffer the cascading consequences.

– Guy Berger

WORK ON IT

Give them skills

A survey by the Readership Institute of US newspapers found that top editors get the **lowest effectiveness ranking** for ensuring that subordinate editors are skilled at managing.

Middle managers were seen as least effective when it came to regularly discussing career goals and providing constructive criticism to employees.

Another key finding was the need for more recognition of reporters. The study said this mattered a great deal to most journalists, but was too often ignored by their leaders.

(from: Leadership: It may never matter more. ASNE Leadership Committee, available at: www.asne.org/kiosk/editor/01.jan-feb/buckner1.htm)

AS I SEE IT

Innovating new products

Peter Bruce
Editor of *Business Day*

At my first BDFM board meeting as editor of *Business Day* in early 2001 I asked for two things.

One was to hire 14 new staff for key jobs I'd identified in the run-up to my editorship. The other was to turn *Business Day* into a sort of shopping basket, full of value-adding supplements we could then use as an excuse to begin charging more for the paper, while also getting more revenue.

Not all went as planned. By the end of 2001 we were deep in the red. Not only had I not hired any of my 14, but we had made a further 35 or so redundant. A scary time.

But the supplements have worked. Last year they raised R30-million and we have more than doubled the cover price in the intervening years.

Almost the entire editorial cost is now, theoretically at least, covered by the cover price. That's been vital to us as the rule obliging listed companies to advertise results is always under threat and, anyway, more than 400 companies (400 advertisers!) have delisted and no longer advertise.

For newspapers, new products are a lifeline, provided the risk is shared.

My idea was to bring revenue in through the new products and to help boost the price of the papers. But how? We had three possibilities:

- We would find sponsors for some supplements (we tried not to call them sponsors, but they were).
- Or we would find partners to co-publish with.
- Or find publishers who wanted to use us as a distribution channel.

The idea with the sponsors was that they would help launch the product by sharing commercial risk: *Business Day PM* (SAA), *Business Day Africa* (Transnet), *Law* (Edward Nathan), *Health* (Discovery). The sales department would use the time created by stable revenue to bring in other advertisers. This didn't always work well in practice and supplements folded after sponsors became fatigued or their managements or priorities changed.

Co-publishing worked better. We produce *Motor News* and *Home Front* with a partner who provides content and advertising. Perhaps because they are weekly, or about cars and homes, they have done incredibly well. I think frequency is vital to a new product.

The only products we innovated ourselves, an eight-page *Appointments* and our monthly luxury magazine *Wanted*, are also profitable.

Now we're preparing to carry our first branded supplement produced entirely outside of the company: a monthly glossy sports magazine. It represents the pinnacle of risk-free publishing: they take the risk and we get 30% of the revenue for free.

It has been critical to us to retain editorial control (or the ability to control). They all carry our brand.

My management colleagues have taught me that you can publish sponsored or co-published products with integrity.

Business Day is a better (and certainly richer) newspaper for them.

HOW WE DID IT

Changing strategy and internalising it

A couple of years ago, *The Star* implemented a new strategy for its editorial content and direction.

In brief, *The Star*'s strategy is:

- Visual paper
- WEDs (writing, editing and design – working in a collaborative process)
- Joburg
- Women
- Trinity (refers to the projection in layout of stories with headline, pictures and stories working together)
- Narrative

The return to local Joburg news was a significant break from past strategy where emphasis was on *The Star* as a national, morning newspaper with a mix of quality and popular stories.

How it was developed

The key thing is to understand the reader: to go beyond simple demographics (age, race, income). We developed a portrait of a Star reader to guide us. Here is a summary.

PORTRAIT OF THE STAR READER

- Greater Jo'burg
- Well-heeled, well-educated – or on their way to getting there
- Aspirant, ambitious, achievers
- Want advice on how to improve their lives
- Robust, love change, risk, controversy, provocation, strong opinion
- Highly visual animals. Pictures/graphics must have an impact
- Self-centred but also touched by …
- Like pleasant surprises


The Star

No crisis? I never said that

But Mbeki still refuses to say if there is one in Zimbabwe

Star barred from cops' hearing

First round of winter is upon us

1 in 2 people get a better deal!

OUTSURANCE

OUR CHECKLIST

Stuck on each *Star* staffer's computer

- Is your intro in *Star* style: short, uncluttered, captures essence of story or most interesting aspect?
- Have you personalised the story?
- Does your photo fit in with the story?
- Have you projected women as citizens and leaders; as survivors rather than victims?
- Have you quoted at least one woman?
- Does this story need a graphic?
- If your story is complex, have you done a WED before writing it?
- Have you included a text pullout?
- Have you given our readers hope?
- Have you told readers where to get help or information?
- Have you answered all the questions readers will ask?
- Does your story have at least two sources?
- Have you checked all names, facts and phone numbers are accurate?
- Have you checked that all the numbers add up?
- Have you made complex things simple?
- Does your layout have a visual focus?
- Have you linked the photo, headline and intro (trinity)?


THE SEARCH FOR LOOKSMART

PART 2: Riddles . . . tears . . . setbacks as the

THE FIELD

The Unknown Man's daily diary of death


44-year quest to find the first detainee to die in 90-day detention moves to a bleak cemetery

OF THE HANGED

For 44 years he lies in an unmarked grave amid thousand of other unmarked graves

- Want hard news, but not rehashed
- Want to understand their world
- International news and trends
- Different portrayal of women
- Quality paper they are proud to read
- Optimistic, patriotic, not parochial
- TIME-PRESSED

Implementing the strategy

1. An executive editor was given the responsibility of being change agent. It was her role to ensure elements of the strategy were incorporated into every edition of the newspaper.
2. Extensive training by the editor and senior executive editors for all staffers on elements of the strategy.
3. Inclusion of the strategy into the daily diary.
4. The change agent made a bookmark-sized list which included elements of the strategy. This was placed on computers for easy reference.
5. Posters with the elements of the strategy were put up around the newsroom.

Keeping it alive

We do this by:

1. Training by editors once a year during which the strategy is explained and all staff (editors, reporters, photographers, design subeditors and copy subeditors, and graphic designers) put the strategy into practice with various exercises.
2. Daily post mortems of the paper – to monitor alignment with the strategy.
3. Writing, Editing, Design (WED) meetings; weekly planning meetings.


THE DYING BRIDE WHO SAID 'I DO'

The Star

Bara baby horror

- Boxes replace infant cribs
- 100 births a day on 16 beds
- R13-million budget cut

Joburg municipal workers on strike after court ruling

Prove my alleged criminality, and I'll meet you in court – Selebi

How our strategy helped

The pages displayed above show how sticking to the strategy has turned out in practice.

– Moegsien Williams, editor of The Star, and colleagues

Repositioning, relaunch and redesign

Thabo Leshilo
Editor-in-chief of *Sowetan* and *Sunday World*

Sowetan has a proud history as a "struggle newspaper".

Like its immediate predecessors, *World* and *Post*, *Sowetan* played a significant role in the fight against apartheid by exposing its evil machinations and devastating human rights violations.

It was one with the reader, hence its circulation success. Just before the advent of democracy in 1994, the paper sold upwards of 250 000 copies. It was also a champion newspaper brand, being voted the top newspaper brand in South Africa for more than a decade.

Ironically, like peace is bad for the arms trade, liberation was bad news for the politically significant *Sowetan*.

The newspaper, like others, failed to read the changing mood. It remained stuck in its old ways, failing to recognise that its readers had grown tired of the apartheid story and wanted to be given hope and inspiration in the new South Africa.

The result was that the paper was selling a mere 118 561 in 2004.

New owners

South African press journalism has undergone a revolution since democracy; most significant is the explosion in popularity of the tabloid genre.

Johncom Media, now Avusa, bought New Africa Publications in August 2004. It was back to the drawing board with the new owners.

They subsequently re-launched *Sowetan* as a popular, racy tabloid on November 12 2004.

Reader research had indicated the newspaper's tired diet of politics and big business stories was not working. Readers said *Sowetan* needed revamping to make it relevant to their lives. It was time to adapt or die.

Community involvement became crucial. We are a developing nation: people look up to newspapers to fight their causes and for guidance. We do this both editorially and through the *Sowetan* Nation Building project.

The re-launched *Sowetan* now focuses on the mainly black African market in the LSM 4-7 category. The strategy is working: circulation has risen to 135 514 (December 2007 ABCs) and readership has shot up from 1,5 million to just over two million (November 2007 AMPs).

Qualipop

The new *Sowetan* likes to be thought of as quality popular (qualipop) or "the thinking man's tabloid". It is important that we continue to enjoy the trust of the reader, hence our slogan "The soul truth".

We see it as a hybrid newspaper, fusing the tried and tested attributes of a traditional quality paper with the best tactics of the tabloids: screaming headlines, colourful design, cheeky in-your-face journalism and witty writing.

It is "sexy but not sleazy" and we steer clear of the gutter – guarding ourselves from this by a public commitment to uphold the SA Press Code and be scrutinised by the Press Ombudsman.

Changing *Sowetan* was easier said than done. It is work in process. We are still institutionalising our mandate. The dearth of journalism skills in general, and in tabloid journalism in particular, makes the ride rough.

This is compounded by resistance to change. Old habits die hard. Expecting seasoned journalists who honed their skills on the field of battle – either covering the June 16 1976 uprisings and aftermath or capturing the turbulent 1980s – to suddenly feel at home producing "light stuff" about celebrities they even resent, proved a tall order. It was also a painful

exercise. Inevitably, there was blood-letting: jobs were shed and people who did not like working on the new product left.

Sadly, although there was an element of good riddance, we also lost people with valuable skills. The brain drain has been debilitating.

Advice

My advice to anybody contemplating taking on such a mammoth task as relaunching a newspaper and leading it in a different direction is:

- Don't do it unless you have lots of energy and are willing to sacrifice your personal life even more than is expected of any journalist.
- Do not be a bull in a china shop. Recognise your own limitations and appreciate that you do not know it all. Defer to your colleagues.
- Credible research is vital. It will help you produce a saleable newspaper. However, research is not a substitute for an editor's wisdom – combined with readers telling you whether you are on the right track or not.
- You should articulate your vision clearly and pursue it clinically and ruthlessly.
- Buy-in from your lieutenants is crucial. They need to internalise your mandate: they too must live and breath it, otherwise you end up with a different newspaper whenever you are not on duty.

The task of repositioning an iconic brand such as *Sowetan* becomes even more daunting if you did not come from within the ranks. To survive and thrive, you must have a thick skin and be prepared do deal with rejection.

You will be the object of people's contempt for a company that is seen as fiddling with a sacred institution. To say this does not mean legacy issues are irrelevant. It would be foolhardy to mistake readers' desire for change and new things to mean you can totally disregard what came before you.

The *Sowetan* reader might yearn for change, but there is a limit to the amount of deviation he or she is willing to take from the path charted by the great Percy Qoboza, Joe Latakgomo, Aggrey Klaaste and Joe Thloloe, with whom our readers still associate the newspaper.

It would be wonderful to have your own core team, unencumbered by fond memories of a glorious past under previous regimes. Then you could ensure you achieve the twin objectives of eliminating resistance to change and infusing the newspaper with the necessary skills and enthusiasm to carry out your mandate.

It is vital to bear in mind that organisations do not fail because everybody working in them is bad. Institutional memory is important ... but only insofar as it can be harnessed to inform the future.


VOTE RESULTS

Why we ran the poll

Some readers might have misconstrued Sowetan poll

CYRIL'S GOT THE GOODS

. and how you cast your vote

Involving their readers in the new-look *Sowetan*.

Communicating through change

Paddi Clay

Head of the Avusa Pearson journalism training programme

For reporters and their editorial managers, "interpersonal contact and face-to-face communication still seems to be the preferred way of communicating with staff, especially when it comes to difficult issues", the Sanef skills audit phase 2 noted.

But is this communication happening in your newsroom? There's a good chance the smoking space – an entirely informal channel which you might never enter – is the major source of information for your staff.

You have two priority target markets you need to communicate with professionally and regularly: your readers or audience and your producers or journalists.

If you're taking your newsroom through a change process, which is almost a given today, additional communication opportunities and channels may be required.

As Conrad and Poole point out: "The greater the uncertainty the greater the need for direct, intensive communication and many adjustments."

Communication should not be confined to diary conference, e-mail, chance encounters in the lift or those formal meetings everyone hates. Interpersonal and informal communcation can be also be promoted through spatial design – which is why newsroom planning is a big

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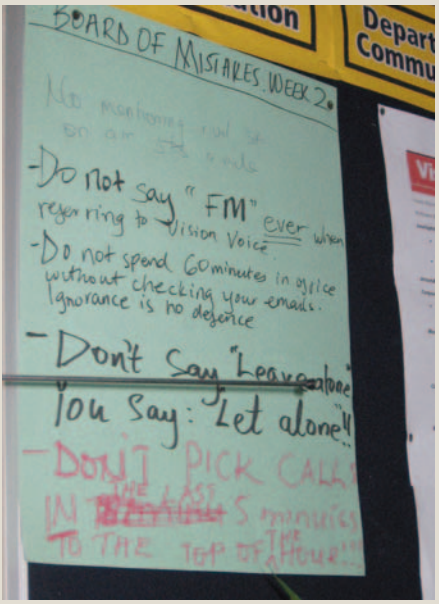


Low-tech communication in a changing environment: the suggestion box and a whiteboard for reminders.

issue when it comes to integrated newsrooms.

This link with proximity is borne out by research done by Jane Singer, who quotes a news manager saying: "When journalists sit 'elbow to elbow' proximity breeds collegiality not contempt."

Digital tools such as Live Messenger, wikis, blogs or bulletin boards can all be used in addition to or as an alternative to face-to-face communication.

In integrated newsrooms, LCD screens should not be for the sports fanatics, but a means of keeping everyone in touch with what is happening on the website or the latest ratings or readership information.

It's also important that you prepare and plan for any formal meeting. How you communicate, particularly in formal meetings, can impact on how you are perceived as a leader.

You need to know who your stakeholders are and who the difficult people are that you need to win over. Think about the outcome you want from the meeting and strategise how you are going to achieve it. Anticipate some of the questions and get your facts to hand. Continually having to defer to management above you for details does your image no good.

When there's a crisis, or gossip is doing the rounds, communicate even more frequently.

There's nothing more embarrassing than your staff reading about coming changes in someone's column or an industry magazine before you've even talked to them.

Communication in this Web 2.0 era cannot simply be one way. Create your own opportunities for staff to feed back to you and don't leave it up to the maligned HR climate survey. An old-fashioned suggestion box, or occasional lunchtime chats with your senior people, not to talk about stories or operational issues but to find out what they're thinking and what the journalists they manage are thinking and are concerned about, will keep you in touch.

Creative people, and that is hopefully what you have around you, need to feel empowered and must be made to feel part of any change you are going to lead them through.

CLARIFYING SOME TERMS

Diverging into convergence

You have a favourite platform – print perhaps, maybe television.

Yet you've now had to belatedly embrace a newcomer. Possibly you've even fallen in love with this wonderful web, and forgone your previous attraction.

But now what's going to happen when mobile really makes an appearance? How do you stay faithful to journalism in the midst of all this movement?

What confounds your thinking is the thick fog around the word "convergence".

For a start, although the term simply means the "coming together of things formerly apart", it also encompasses a multitude of highly different degrees of integration.

Unless you stay fixated on the journalism, an editor can easily get lost in a forest of fuzzy language and too many forks in the road.

In addition, confusion occurs because convergence can also apply at many levels – macro to micro:

- You can get corporate convergence (as in joint ventures) between telcom and media companies, for instance. Or between, say, TV and newspaper companies. (Watch this space in SA).
- The branching out of a traditional print operation into internet publishing or audio/video or mobile, is another realm of convergence.
- Reverse publishing from the web into print is another instance.
- Production processes, where content is co-ordinated or shared.
- The skill-sets of previously segregated specialist media practitioners – whether reporter, news editor, or production personnel – can also be part of convergence.
- Convergence can also refer media consumer devices: the camera-cellphone for instance, or computers being used to watch video broadcasts.
- There's a coming together of producer and consumer functions: what Dan Gilmor calls "the people formerly known as the audience" are increasingly generating media.

Like most things, these convergences are largely driven by economics – although often they are still some way off demonstrating either significant profit or even serious savings. It's that tenuous status that heightens pressure on editors to make convergent activity economically viable.

Focus wider

Editors have to start stretching their focus to track this gamut of issues, while at the same time figuring out the specifics of your operation in regard to any single one of them.

Few editorial leaders nowadays can think only one platform (for example the newspaper), even if they do (for now) give it priority attention. At the very least, there's a need to acknowledge an interconnection (and sometimes tension) between outlets, and then work with a holistic view.

The good news is that there's no holy grail or ultimate destination of achieving 100% convergence. Instead, there's good reason for a lot of heterogeneity to persist within the broader merging.

And yet an editor also has to transcend any "us" and "them" mentality between employees working in diverse areas and coming from different media models.

Take note

In managing all the complexities of convergence, the areas below need attention.

- Technology: editors have to have a strong interest in the workings of whatever Content Management System is used to underpin the convergence; you can't delegate this concern to techies.
- Critical in a convergent context is the need to manage resistant cultures and narrow skill-sets bequeathed from one medium, and to re-engineer the routines that underpin these.
- Most vital is the journalism: sophisticated story-telling that runs across several platforms, and which may include not just *multiple media* on

the web (video, audio, photos around a given story), but also fully fledged *multi-media* (a mix of text, audio, visuals in an interactive graphic package where the sum is greater than the parts).

It's fatal to try and force the pace of convergence without continuing communication among the players, re-designing job descriptions, amending work flow processes, sorting out new deadline systems and creating guidelines for which platform comes first.

In all this, gradual or rapid multi-skilling of staff seems inevitable, even if core areas of focus and competence will continue. Journalists doing blogging is just one indication of this.

Strategic issues

How much you automate the re-publishing and re-purposing of content for a different platform is a management challenge, not least because of the copyright issues implicated.

A distinct challenge is pre-purposing, which entails advance organising to cover a big story in terms of how the full bouquet of platforms can be best exploited. It's a matter of planning which aspects are best told in print, broadcast, web or other formats ... and when. Cross-promotion protocols need devising.

One global trend in recent years has been towards reintegrating formerly divergent web-operations into the purview of an overall newsdesk, and operating within the same newsroom space. Technical, environmental, ergonomic, special and cultural issues are thrown up by this.

"Social media" and user-generated content in the whole package is a major extra component needing to be taken on board.

New policies are needed for all this – for example, on the degree of moderation, the type and amount of hyperlinks in your content, staff blogging guidelines and audience interaction.

Editors have to lead the process, no matter how technophobic or traditionalist, or risk the future of your medium and even your own job.

Embrace it by working closely with innovators and early adopters in the newsroom. These are the personnel who will help you to evolve workable models and diffuse convergence at the coalface.

– Guy Berger

HINTS

What makes it easier or harder

Enablers for 'easy' convergence	Complicators making for 'difficult' convergence
It's made central to organisation's strategy	Not central: secondary or an afterthought
There is committed and focused leadership	Other leadership priorities
A culture of innovation and risk-taking	"Always done it this way"
Co-ordinating structure	No co-ordinating structure
Same ownership	Different ownership
Same values	Different values
Aligned systems and processes	Systems not aligned
Past successes together	Previous problems or no relationship
Cultures flexible or similar	Cultures not flexible or similar
Co-located	Located some distance apart

(adapted from Gentry, 2004, cited in Quinn, S. & Filak, V.F. 2005. Convergent journalism: an introduction: writing and producing across media. Amsterdam: Elsevier)

Challenges of New Media

Judy Sandison
Editor: new media, SABC News

The changing media landscape in terms of new technologies and new consumer habits is impacting on the way newsrooms are run.

Factors driving growth in new media include:

- The growing use, by 18- to 35-year-olds, of the internet for news.
- Rapid growth in general internet usage.
- The cellphone "revolution" in Africa.
- The growing need for 24-hour "news on demand".

With these market forces at play for new forms of "news on the run", the pressure is on for news producers to provide users with news on a variety of platforms and in various formats, to keep the appetites for news feed via both "push" and "pull" technologies.

News consumers have also become more savvy ... with ever-widening choices of where to source the news they want first.

The challenge is to provide fresh, relevant, accurate news in an almost continuous news stream in single or multi-media formats, while still catering for the more traditional user in the form of fixed-time news bulletins or products.

Don't wait

Newsroom leaders cannot afford to wait or they'll be left behind – they need to explore potential niched new media opportunities while still running their traditional news operations.

Who could have predicted that a broadcaster's arena would now encompass cellphone technologies such as the SABC's 082 152 audio news-on-phones service or that cellphone networks would themselves look at producing their own content, such as Safaritel in Kenya?

The edges are getting blurred. But one key challenge in every newsroom remains providing a relevant and credible product that the end-user perceives to have value.

Leadership anew

These trends have thrown up new leadership challenges:

- To keep pace with the rapid growth in new technology
- To adapt content to the medium
- To be responsive to the changing needs of users
- To remain competitive and cost effective, and generate new revenue streams.

Pioneering new media editors must now:

- Be entrepreneurs, facilitators and leaders
- Still meet the more traditional managerial requirements of their organisations
- Retain consumer trust in the credibility of the product
- Be open to different and unusual partnerships.

Journalists themselves have to become more multi-skilled and accountable. Team leaders need to be facilitators, not autocrats; teams have to be results-oriented and add to their skills base daily in order to provide customised, personalised, 24-hour news and information.

Markets are widening as low-technology tools such as wind-up battery chargers for cell phones and WAP-enabled phones make the internet accessible to many more across Africa.

Managers need to shape and grow new products with their teams, be directly accountable, provide strong training and support, and share regu-

HOW I SEE IT

Cellphone billboards in Uganda are symptomatic of the spread of the medium.

lar communication and feedback.

The manager or editor needs to be a strong driver who makes things happen: be results-oriented and decisive in selecting suitable team members and putting things in place.

Bigger picture

Issues such as the pros and cons of total or partial integration into the newsroom need to be addressed while keeping momentum going related to the bigger picture. While being responsive to special new media needs, team members must be encouraged to be self-starters. Synergies with other newsroom teams within your media house are vital.

New team dynamics must be managed as part of the broader newsroom. Each leader must play both a strategic and operational role.

Maintaining a decentralised and flexible operation, responsive to new opportunities, is vital, as are regular "tweaking" of the products/services and radical changes when required Use audience research, monitor output; get feedback from the marketplace.

Do not forget to manage upwards: promote awareness in top management of the needs of news as a "business".

Ensure fast decision-making on new policy/strategy matters. Keep them informed on progress and new developments. Be open to new leads and ideas.

And while managing all these developments, always remember:

- To balance the commercial and public interest
- Promote synergies between old and new media
- Communicate and give feedback
- Identify and harness any "spare" capacity.

The integrated newsroom

Ray Hartley
Editor of *The Times*

The Times newsroom was designed from scratch by the editorial team after much discussion about the ideal workflow for an integrated newspaper and online operation.

The first big decision we took was to totally integrate photographic, multimedia and print journalists by creating what we called "pods".

The idea was to have a writer, video producer and photographer working on a beat sitting together at a workstation. This is quite a radical departure from the traditional newsroom.

It also made a statement about the equal status of these three distinct roles. Crucially, it acknowledged that writing, video production and photography were specialisations with their own disciplines and special skills.

The second major decision was to have a totally open plan workspace with NO offices – not even for the editor – showing our intention to be a workplace that prized constant communication higher than the status attached to having an office.

Content managers sit together in a hub and are able to communicate with each other easily at any time.

These moves were crucial in sending a signal that we were creating a new newsroom culture.

However, for the new generation of journalists, born in the digital age, there are few challenges. They live convergent lifestyles and are promiscuous when it comes to their personal use of content channels. We actively sought out and hired young staff for this reason.

With the more senior staff coming out of print backgrounds, the largest chal-

The *Dispatch* newsroom and its new design, inspired by the UK *Telegraph*. A central hub situates online and print editors together, with 'spokes' running off into the rest of the floor grouping the various departments together. This is a slightly different approach to that of *The Times*.

HOW WE DID IT

lenge was to reset their "publication default position", if you can call it that, to the 24-7 operation online.

Their gut instinct, learned through the intense competition between print titles, is to hold back everything for print and to keep it as secret as possible until then.

So the most obvious sign of success in achieving change is being first with the news online – and doing it with your own news staff. This immediately places you ahead of the competition who rely heavily on news agency copy.

For us a key indicator is whether or not we have multimedia to punt in our daily paper alongside our print stories. This indicates clearly whether or not the teams are working together.

On multi-skilling, we chose not to go this route because we want to develop quality: in writing, multimedia and pictures. We would like everyone to attain a foundation level of knowledge about how other streams work, but we want them to focus on their own skills.

Having said that, the ability to record digital sound for use online in podcasts or to take pictures in a crisis situation is encouraged.

In priorising stories for specific platforms, and managing staff deployment, we took a strong position.

Web must come first because it's the 24-7 medium. Once this is the default position for filing breaking news, it becomes easy to select the exceptions to be held back for print. All employees are expected to work for all platforms. It's in all our performance documents.

When it comes to training, we take the view that multimedia journalism is an entirely new discipline. Here the fastest learning has taken place. There are regular reviews of videos, usually by an experienced producer from outside. Other than that, training has been very much on the job.

BIGGER WEB 2.0 PICTURE

All things digital

Digital media content can be converted to different forms (eg text to audio) and sent out in diverse packages, through various channels, to scores of platforms.

That's given millions access to content as consumers and producers - hence the explosion of content out there in general.

Information is less and less a scarce commodity. What's scarce is attention.

Competition now is with all kinds of institutions and individuals who become media-tised via Internet publishing.

It used to be that a media company operated most of its own information gathering, editing, packaging and dissemination, all for a fairly loyal audience. This integration is being dis-articulated:

- **Information gathering**

Besides reporters, there's "citizen journalists", "user-generated content" and "imports" of content from elsewhere (eg YouTube via embedded links).

- **Editing**

Look at increased outsourcing (eg of subbing), and involvement of audiences in rating and ranking what content plays prominently online. In a wiki, content is crowd-edited ... without end.

- **Packaging**

Third-party aggregators like Google bundle media content in different guises. Individuals and institutions "mash" it into their own published packages.

- **Distribution**

Think RSS feeds, content placed on other websites, and what's circulated by users.

- **Consumption**

Consumption online is driven through links (via search engines, RSS and social network recommendations). Audiences are opportunistic and transitory.

- **Advertising**

News audiences that shift online do retain some loyalty to old media brands now in cyberspace. But advertising is not migrating to news sites to the same extent. Advertisers have their own online platforms; search engines offer highly focused targeting and measurable returns. Subscription revenues for online news have failed. But the billing culture of cellphones has potential. – *Guy Berger*

The people are coming ...

Blogging

Editors are increasingly dealing with outsiders who blog on the website of your media house. You probably have staff who do likewise and who may also maintain blogs elsewhere.

Here are some guidelines – drawn in part from the BBC.

Staff who blog should be:

- Encouraged, because it helps enrich and diversify the content on offer.
- Sensitive to possible conflicts of interest like disclosing confidential in-company matters.
- Required to indicate, where appropriate, that the blog expresses personal views, not those of the company.
- Advised to avoid taking up a position on controversial subjects where this can be seen as compromising their journalistic work.

With blogs, it's not content that's king but conversation around that content. So staff who blog need to be responsive to public comments on their company sites as part of the job, and they need to get time to do so.

Outside bloggers:

This kind of user-generated content is one part of a wider field of public contribution to the media, including citizen journalism and general participation. Guidelines here can be the same as those for citizen/community contributors.

Citizen/community contributions

A distinction should be made between general *community participation* and *citizen journalism*.

"Participation" includes things like ranking content, commenting on articles or blogs, and submitting community information (like anti-crime forum meeting times).

"Citizen journalism", on the other hand, entails reportage. Users of news website blogs may not always be doing journalism with this technology and genre, but equally they may sometimes be doing what are often called "acts of journalism".

Part of the ethos of public involvement is a context of moving away from content being treated only as a one-way broadcast, to it becoming a dynamic and continuing conversation.

Although just one percent of a site's regular users will usually be active contributors in the various forms, their input can add enormous value to a website.

All should be clearly signalled as community input, and be limited by clearly posted parameters about hate-speech and defamation.

Special guidelines can be set out for those contributing "citizen journalism" (whether articles, images, video or blog postings):

- Contributions need to meet the company's standards of accuracy, fairness and editorial policy.
- Would-be contributors should not risk their safety to collect content.
- They should respect people's privacy – and where appropriate, may need to demonstrate that they have the consent of the people featured in their contributions.
- Citizen journalists may be asked to verify factual accuracy, and convince a media house they have not manipulated or pirated digital images.
- They should declare any vested interests (such as content collected on behalf of a lobby group).
- They should know that the media house may be required by law to pass materials to the police, even the identity of the contributor.
- The contributor will have to cede defined rights – exclusive or partial – to the media house to publish the materials.
- Payment for such contributions is at the discretion of the company.

As part of "public journalism", a media house can offer online or workshop-based classes to help amateur journalists do a more professional job and enhance the quality and uptake of contributions.

On the other hand, there are also many cases in the US where amateurs, precisely because they were untrained, have picked up on major news which was overlooked within the routines and expectations of professional journalists.

It's not essential, therefore, that all citizen journalists need to be trained to be the equivalents of traditional freelancers, even if courses and critical feedback might make sense with particular contributors.

Social networks

More and more people are using the internet to join communities, and astute editors will find ways to coalesce some of these loose groupings around their media content niches.

But all viable communities need leaders and systems, and a media house has to contribute to these functions if its hosting of networks is to succeed.

It's probably impossible to create a community (local or interest-based) that does not exist in some latent form, which also means a medium cannot impose itself as some kind of executive mayor on a community.

The point is that a social network involves a media house *communicating with* an audience, and facilitating their intra-communication ... not just *communicating to* them.

Community management

Some media abroad have appointed community managers to be responsible for servicing online social networks, although it is also often seen as important that newsroom staff also contribute to what has been called "community gardening".

The role of community management (perhaps spread across a number of employees, fulfilling various roles) means listening to niche communities around your content, giving feedback to the editor and staff, acknowledging and engaging with the people participating in communities, tracking significant trends, commenting on outside blogs, overseeing keywords and links to relevant content and getting employees involved as well.

As one observer noted: community management means keeping conversations going and avoiding the development of virtual "ghost towns".

Another duty is to act as neighbourhood cop and curtail "trolls": disruptive people who harass and alienate others.

Editorial decisions need to be made about whether community management includes monitoring and moderating for quality, language use and/or legal issues.

These matters can have substantial implications for human resources. Many sites seek to avoid this issue by disclaiming direct responsibility and instead providing ways for people to report "inappropriate" content which can then be investigated and possibly taken down.

Best practice is that community management is not just restricted to online interaction, but that the staff most involved in this function also attend, and even convene, events in real life that are relevant to those people who participate.

Crowd sourcing

Whereas citizen journalism is usually initiated by individual members of the public, "crowd sourcing" tends to be at the initiative of the media house and is an appeal for mass, rather than individual, involvement in newsgathering.

At minimum, it can be a form of polling people for their opinions. It can also be a way to canvass interest in a particular story.

And in a celebrated case of investigating sewers at Fort Myers in the US, "crowd sourcing" successfully elicited people's experiences which were then incorporated into published content (see www.news-press.com/apps/pbcs.dll/section?Category=CAPEWATER).

While this kind of involvement is powerful, in some cases an editor may wish to keep an investigation confidential rather than reveal it through "crowd sourcing".

What do you put online?

Online publishing or broadcasting should not be an afterthought, fed only with scraps from the main table. It needs serious exploitation because a time will inevitably come when this offspring is likely to become your major platform.

By then, you need to have built your brand and engaged an audience.

George Brock, 2007 president of the World Editors Forum, has warned of a large disconnect between the thinking about the future newsroom and the actual preparation, training and resources that editorial organisations seem to be giving to this project.

So, human and other resources should be invested in online. Indeed, such online activities can also enrich your primary platform through "reverse publishing" where appropriate.

However, the two realms of traditional and new do need to be coordinated. For instance, many media houses abroad are moving to a "web first" policy, not just with breaking news alerts, but even with scoops and exclusives.

This is a key issue that needs to be decided and then reviewed from time to time.

Another important issue for editors in the transition to online is that content on this platform needs to be broken up into screenfuls and/or streams.

In some cases it may include the story behind the story: how the content was created.

In addition, there's the opportunity to configure or reconfigure it so as to include a fun or game element.

– Guy Berger

CHANGES IN NEWS CYCLES

Build a bouquet

The rhythm and form of editorial output continues to change.

In the US, Associated Press has a model of "1-2-3 filing". This starts with a news alert headline for breaking news, usually followed by step two as a short present-tense story predominantly for web and broadcasters. The third step is to add detail and format the content for different news platforms, for example as a textual news analysis, a multi-media piece … or nothing if the story doesn't warrant it.

This kind of approach has been elaborated by Paul Bradshaw who points to two dimensions: speed and depth.

For **speed**, content can be generated and distributed as:

- An alert (mobile, e-mail)
- A draft (such as a blog)
- An article/package (print, audio and/or video forms)

For **depth**, the following levels of complexity can be mounted:

- Context added (hyperlink, and embedded content via widgets)
- Analysis/reflection (an article/package in various formats, based on research and assessment)
- Interactivity (flash, chats, forums, wikis)
- Customisation (RSS, ratings, social networking)

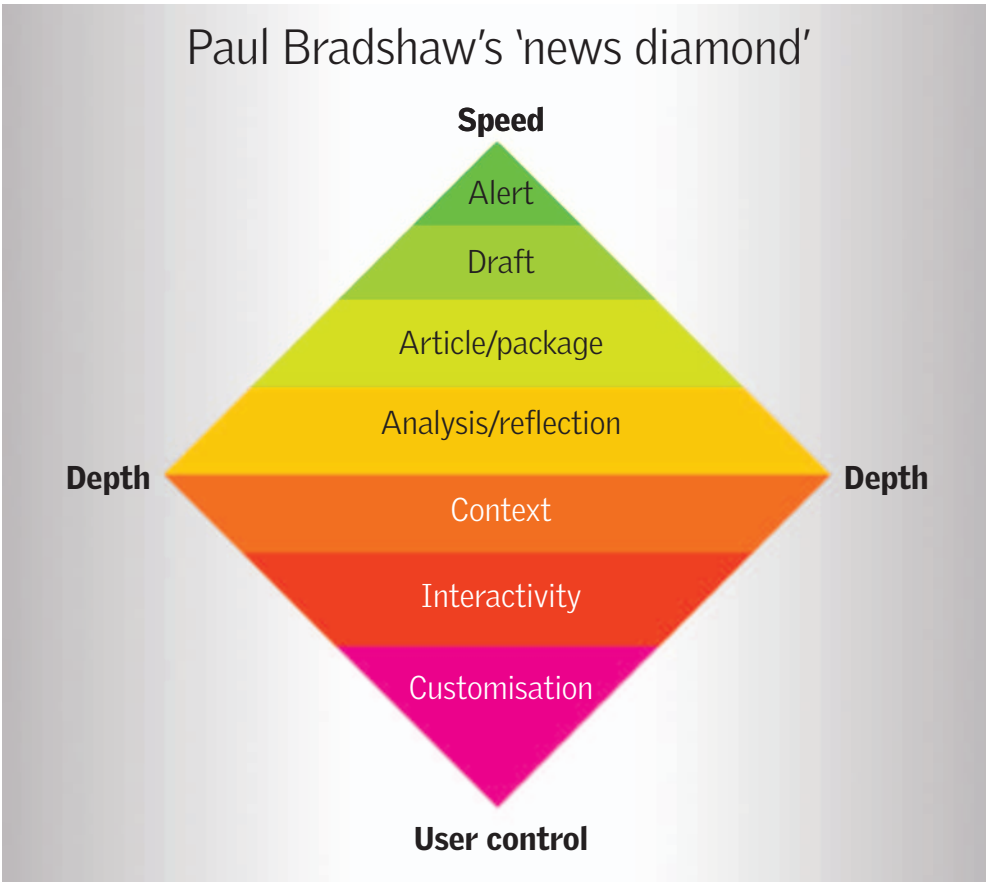
Bradshaw acknowledges that this diamond model (see opposite) is not necessarily a linear one, and several of the story treatments he describes can unfold simultaneously, depending on how a newsdesk judges the story at hand. The point, however, is the many options possible in an era of digital information.

Editors need to give leadership on these issues.

Hyperlinks

Among the policies needed is one on hyperlinks. Many companies over the years have decreased the use of this content-enriching capacity, especially in regard to links pointing to rival media.

But things are changing as the media industry begins to close ranks in the face



The many options possible in an era of digital information. Discuss 'A model for the 21st century newsroom' on Bradshaw's blog: http://onlinejournalismblog.com

of competition for other forces online. As we have seen, the *New York Times* and *Washington Post* have agreed to collaborate in linking to each other. And more fundamentally there is the point, as web expert Dave Winer states: "People come back to places that send them away."

Online-only visuals

Another issue about online content is the option to provide data in diverse formats, especially in various visualisations that cannot easily be done on other platforms. For instance: maps showing crime hotspots, interactive graphs and graphics, geo-located cases of xenophobic violence. These are instances when the full visual and interactive potential of online can really be exploited.

Be out there

Commentator Kevin Anderson has written: "The day of building a website and expecting everyone to come to you is over." Instead, you have to free up your content to *follow* the audiences and be where they are.

Increasingly, people come to websites only indirectly – through various back doors and outside aggregators of content (often non-human – like Google News).

That means:

- Providing RSS feeds so that people can check your headlines, and visit particular stories, without the schlep of having to visit your site (or, more likely, not) to check if there's anything of specific interest to consume.
- Ensuring search engine optimisation (SEO) so your online content gets to users when they do a Google search.
- Having a presence in social networks like Facebook, Flickr, Youtube, Twitter and their South African equivalents like Myvideo.co.za.
- Providing widget links so others can easily embed your content in their blogs.

– Guy Berger

WEB 2.0

Unpacking the jargon

Web 2.0 is the term informally used to describe the evolution of the web in three respects:

1. Metadata or tagging

It's all about the internet changing from being a static documents resource into a database with metadata about information. This transformation enables unprecedented linkages and new meanings to emerge. Here, keywords or "tags" have become fundamental to the architecture of the internet. These labels on content are what enable people, for instance, to find Africa photos on Flickr, or allow your website to send out very specific content feeds. This is the early phase of what is dubbed the Semantic Web, where meaningful connections can be derived from online content in interoperable ("open") formats between different sites.

2. Read-write web

Whereas the web used to be one with a substantial division between users as producers and consumers of content, increasingly members of the "audience" are adding to the mix through comments, posting photographs and setting up blogs. Many people are now living a lot of their lives online in public.

3. Social networks

This refers to people (higher numbers of women than men) using the internet not only to connect to electronic content, but also to other people such as friends and family, and strangers. Many social connections are also often around, and about, this content – whether it is through games, debates, re-publishing, appropriations and "mash-ups".

This social relationship in part replaces isolated surfing or searching for relevant information. Accordingly, your communities recommend content to you via utilities like Twitter (micro-blog messages online or on phone), e-mail, links from their own blogs, or on the pages within social network sites.

The result is a surfacing of content, where relevant information finds individuals, not vice versa. An example is the World Association of Newspapers' editors weblog, which constitutes a resourceful community of editors.

More broadly, though, the social network phenomenon means for editors that there is a new force in society that takes the place of your editorial decisions about what's relevant to an audience that once relied on you. These communities now decide whether to highlight your offerings or not – and you have to find ways to be valuable to them.

Mobile media

Most South Africans will experience the internet on cellphones long before they have regular access on desk- or laptop computers. Millions are already doing so in the form of the enclosed service provided by Mixit.

But the question is whether mobile devices will really become instruments for more than interpersonal conversation or messaging – that is, also become a means to receive and produce journalism. The answer is in the affirmative.

On the hardware level, the form factor of small screens is not really a deterrent.

And as regards software, there is Google's Linux-based and open source operating system, called Android, that will span numerous makes of mobile devices.

Once South Africa begins digital broadcasting to the new generation of receiver-ready cellphones, the public will become accustomed to seeing these devices as media tools.

The mobile model will also open a whole new market for location-based information services, and probably substantial audio options, that forward-looking editors can begin to anticipate. Because the public is acculturated to paying for telephony, a business model could include a mix of subscriptions and advertising revenue sufficient to enable the content costs to be covered.

Content Management Systems

As editor, you'll probably find a content management system (CMS) in place that predates you. However, any CMS should be regarded as an iterative process, rather than a final product.

For instance, at the *Grocott's Mail* the paper's open source system, named Nika, began only with workflow management – then evolved to articulating the newspaper content with a website. The third phase will give Web 2.0 functionality (blogs, networks, comment functions), and the fourth will include mobile, audio and video components. It will probably need the ongoing addition of features in response to the emergence of new functionalities and externalities (like interfaces to receive and publish video from phones).

To keep up-to-date and make tech work for you (rather than vice versa), you need to initiate action for updates or alterations to your own CMS, to suit the changing editorial process.

Some considerations:

1 **Workflow:** Does your CMS allow proper version control and electronic performance monitoring? Are there too many clicks before a story is completed? Do word-processing and photo-editing interfaces work as seamlessly as they should? If not, try to get them revised.

2 **Knowledge management:** Is the system optimum at enabling the generation and capture of the institution's knowledge of processes, systems and personal learning? Is your intranet up to speed in terms of dissemination, and does it include style-guides and administrative forms, and internal blogs?

3 **Database/archive:** Is your database set up for maximum searchability of text and images (internally, and even externally depending on to policy), and have you given sufficient thought to what metadata fields are required for this to happen?

4 **Copyright:** Does your system allow for digital rights management – and is this driven by an agreed policy of intellectual property among stakeholders concerning both current information and archives?

5 **Enterprise-wide IT:** Can this be integrated so as to seamlessly access data from, for example, your switchboard, or to export comments on your blogs to customer relations management software?

6 **From a content management point of view, you will need to guide the technical side. For instance in terms of:**

- Helping you figure out the content strategy of how to play online or to cellular ... and back.
- Deciding what will be automated, versus what will be customised.
- Thinking ahead – for instance, you can't easily automate feed streams via SMS at a later date, if you haven't been storing your content data with appropriate metadata keywords and classifications.

7 **Dynamism:** How fixed/dumb is the system as compared to one that is intelligent and able to allow flexibility and change according to users' actual patterns?

8 **Your software system:** Many newspapers today are using open-source software CMS's, especially Drupal. Examples are the *New York Observer*, *Al Quds*, *Die Welt*, *Die Zeit*.

9 **Finding free tools:** Are there tools "in the cloud" that you can make use of? Can you use Wordpress for blogs to feed into your site, Twitter to feed in SMS, Youtube to host your own and other relevant video, and Skype to do podcasting? How about Ning.com or Google-Friends to provide at least interim support for your social network experiments?

– Guy Berger

Whose side are you on?

Do you support the Professionalistas or the Populists? The career journalists or amateurs? Here are the arguments:

Harden D. Pro: Part-time and semi-skilled people can't do the job, and the idea that they can is only of benefit to the bosses who think they can source content without having to pay for it. But it takes investment in beat expertise to report on complexities, have inside-insight and dig out scandals – and this won't be done by "citizen journalists".

Citizen J: Grassroots people can send in newsworthy information, even if we can't always do the legwork that pro's do.

Harden D. Pro: Citizen content requires extensive checks and editing – which we don't have time to do. You are not in our core business supply chain.

Citizen J: Well, you can't stop the trend. People want to see their voices in the mainstream; you'll be marginalised if you resist. Some of us do secure recognition for our work – certainly we don't usually do it for the money. The industry should appreciate and value this energy.

Harden D. Pro: Sorry, but your output is amateurish, opinionated, unsubstantiated.

Citizen J: Your mainstream journalism claims independence, but the reality is you being fed agendas by politicians or corporate interests – or your own colleagues are playing political games.

Harden D. Pro: Accepting the standing of citizen contributions reduces journalism to the lowest common denominator: – every Joe Soap is then treated as an equal of, say, a prize-winning photojournalist.

Citizen J: At least we are usually explicitly advocacy-oriented, whereas your journalism is skewed to status quo elite sources, and ignores grassroots views. We fill a gap, especially at the community level, because the mainstream can't afford or does not bother to send reporters there. Your people miss serious stories and sometimes have preconceived – and wrong – ideas about what audiences want to know.

Harden D. Pro: Everyone can concede that the eruption of user-generated content does deepen the public sphere – but that doesn't make it "journalism" in most cases.

Citizen J: Our brand of journalism is often closer to truth and justice than so-called "journalists" in state-controlled media. But basically, our work should be taken as complementary to, rather than competition with, mainstream reporters.

Harden D. Pro: There's no clear difference between what you do and a student who thinks his or her Facebook posts amount to journalism.

Citizen J: Community participation is not automatically incompatible with journalism. Anyone with a connection can do journalism on Facebook, a blog, a Twitter stream, or by giving content to the mainstream as a freelancer would. And, there's enough mainstream content – like lifted chunks of press releases – that barely counts as journalism.

Harden D. Pro: But many of you people seem to target us en bloc, presuming yourselves to be a 5th Estate watching us. It seems you want to supplant us.

Citizen J: A dose of your own medicine? But many people – audiences and amateur producers – are unhappy with the state of the mainstream. It is a different question whether our journalism can address your problems, but the mainstream should look to improve itself with or without competition from us.

Harden D. Pro: I accept some citizen journalists do investigate, check their facts, keep independent. But the real value to me is that you put information into circulation, which can be mined for nuggets by us traditional journalists.

Citizen J: No one realistically believes traditional journalism can or will be replaced with citizen journalism. But we keep you on your toes and add to quality content. And increasingly there are hybrids possible, like "pro-am" collaborations and "open source journalism". Try some of these exciting possibilities The basic difference is that you are no longer secluded kings of content.

– Guy Berger

HOW WE DID IT

Blogging

Andrew Trench

Deputy editor of the *Daily Dispatch* and *DispatchOnline* editor

Our first tentative steps into blogging were in mid-2007 when we started working seriously on relaunching our *Dispatch* website, which hadn't had a makeover in about 10 years.

My initial idea was to start a blog built on the *Dispatch* brand, to play around with it as a medium and, most importantly, use it to start getting a better idea of our online audience.

Andrew Sherry, a deputy managing editor for online news at *US Today*, inspired the idea at a workshop in Johannesburg where I asked him how we could put together a quality online offering without millions to invest.

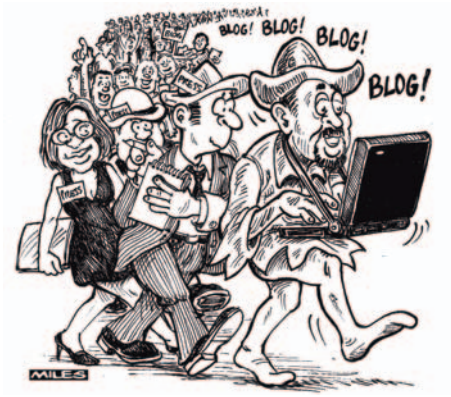
"Use blogs" he replied: they are easy to operate, they empower writers – and are useful as a radar to "get out in front of your readers". So Dispatches from the Trench was born.

I used the blog in the beginning to talk about things going on in the paper, decisions we were making and what we were thinking regarding online plans.

It had a great response from the start – as if there were hordes of readers who had been standing behind locked doors dying to talk with us.

The experience was the most invigorating of my career. Here was an opportunity for journalists to speak directly to readers, for this to be instantaneously a two-way street and for the relationship between reader and newspaper to deepen in ways we had never imagined. I rapidly became a blogging evangelist within our newspaper.

Anyone who thinks this is a medium for the young, think again. One of our most successful bloggers is 60-something Investigations Editor Eddie Botha, whose blog is a must-read.



At last count we had 13 blogs running within *Dispatch*. But the two that I find most exciting, in how they have broadened our traditional horizons, are Epozini and Bloos-Kaap Blues.

As their names suggest, one is in Xhosa, the other in Afrikaans. Epozini is a hub of debate and discussion in a language we do not traditionally publish. Who would have thought we would now be a publication of English, Afrikaans and Xhosa? Thanks to blogs.

Our blogs are now so important that we run our dynamic news content on our new website through a feed off our Dispatch Now breaking news blog, and run a feed of comments from our blogs on the home page. Readers are now an integral part of our content.

Blogs have extended the role newspapers have always had in a community. They make our journalism better, our paper more transparent and accountable to its readers – and we are learning more about them every day. We also get dozens of story tips.

The most important lesson is to trust your staff to speak to your readers directly. We had a quick meeting of our bloggers, decided on some basic rules and let our bloggers do their thing.

Sometimes I see some blog posts by a young reporter that make my toenails curl. But, you know what? I've yet to see a complaint from an online reader. Meanwhile, our reporters who are blogging are writing more than ever before – and that can't be bad.

Extra work and other multi-issues

"Who here is paying their staff extra to work across multiple platforms?" a speaker recently asked 35 editors and media managers from all over Africa at a Sol Plaatje Media Leadership Institute meeting in Kampala.

Not one raised a hand.

Many editors around the world are currently expected to deliver more and new kinds of content with fewer or the same resources, partly due to the market imperative to go to web and multimedia without guaranteed advertising income for the new platforms, partly due to a loss of advertising revenue to new media.

And they have to do it *immediately*, while continually adapting to fast changes in the media world. A headache for editors – and one often dealt with by having lower standards for web content.

At the same time, journalists are worrying about their jobs – and one big aspect of this is the extra work required.

When this issue comes to a head, it sometimes leads to renegotiation of contracts, sometimes to stand-offs with unions and sometimes to discretionary salary increases for those individuals who have taken on new tasks.

In many cases, media just rely on the enthusiasm of journalists on their staff: counting on ambitious volunteers to take on the new work.

It is a lot clearer where there is a separate digital operation from the original media: those people are employed to do that work, and then journalists from the other media (the newspaper or magazine) who also write for web, either do it voluntarily or get paid as a freelancer.

It is also clearer with freelancers: but their contracts need to state whether their work can be published on multiple platforms or whether they are paid extra.

The problem comes with bringing web operations and multimedia into a newsroom where previously content was produced for one platform, with predictable deadlines. For example, a reporter covering a story previously wrote an article, sidebar and opinion piece; now he/she may have to file breaking news headlines, a short story for the web, a longer one for print, the opinion piece, plus carry a digital camera and file photos or video, do a short radio comment and update a blog – with continuous deadlines. Are they now "churning"?

But journalists are rarely just concerned about being paid fairly for work done: there are a variety of interrelated spin-offs.

Here are the issues that will be worrying your journalists, which editors need to decide how to handle.

1. More work

Are journalists being asked to work more than their 40-hour week, or just work faster? Is the need to interact more with readers, or to blog frequently, creating a burden on reporters' time? Can your overtime arrangements (extra pay or time off) cover any extra hours worked? Do your performance agreements spell out how much work a journalist is expected to do?

2. Extra responsibility

If journalists are given different, or higher-level, responsibilities, this is usually a grading issue. Can you upgrade those who take this on? And how about those who just take on *more* responsibility: can you re-negotiate contracts or performance agreements? Is this an "operational requirement" that workers cannot refuse, or a change in working conditions?

3. New skills

Are journalists being properly trained (formally and on the job) to take on new tasks? Can you create training programmes to give them speed, competency and confidence? Do you need any journalists who do not master new skills (such as writers who have no visual ability to take photos) to still practise them? Do you multi-skill all reporters, or specialise some, and to what extent?

4. Lower quality

If journalists are "churning", is the quality of their work dropping? Can you find

ways to ensure your journalists have some time to boost their creativity and avoid burn-out or boring "event-based" journalism? How will you still get good scoops, original writing and in-depth analysis while having to feed the 24-hour monster that is the internet? Is this a problem for retention of good staff?

5. Lack of clarity on job roles

There is no doubt the boundaries between media jobs are blurring more than before, though on small media such as community radio or papers this has always occurred. Do your reporters now have to sub their own stories? Who writes the text for picture galleries? Does a technician end up writing headlines for web stories? Can you create guidelines on who has to do what, when?

6. Lack of checks

Are the stories, video, picture galleries or podcasts put on the web, or headlines sent out on mobile, going through the same set of checks that a newspaper article or radio bulletin goes through, or are corners dangerously cut?

Newspaper articles usually go from journalist to news editor, to chief sub, to sub, to revise and to page proof – that's five checks, and mistakes and legals still get in the paper! Can you afford to have only one check before a web item is posted, or can you put similar checking structures in place while still ensuring speed?

Finding solutions

Multi-media and multiple platforms are changing the lives of journalists. Some will respond positively, realising they must adapt and learn to further their careers; others will want to stick to the job they applied for in the first place.

Some of these issues need to be negotiated with your staff as a whole, some with unions and some with individuals. And some can be resolved by good communication, consultation, training, guidelines, planning and structuring the work. – *Elizabeth Barratt*

DEFINITION

What is this 'churnalism'?

It is not journalism.

It is the rapid recyling of information which is not properly verified, often due to the pressure on journalists to produce reports at great speed ... or to a lack of will to stick to personal and ethical choices.

In its most negative form, it is the practice of regurgitating material, rapidly and under pressure, from outside sources without checking, corroborating or investigating.

In his book "*Flat earth news*", British National Union of Journalists (NUJ) member and *Guardian* freelancer Nick Davies writes that most UK journalists do not research or check information back against **original** sources – especially in regard to the Iraq war. They use second-hand material: stuff already published by others, thereby sometimes republishing lies, manipulation, or propaganda.

In South Africa this cannot yet be blamed on the pressures of internet reporting, but it was seen in how the media mass-reported the incorrect fact that Judge Hilary Squires had said there was a "generally corrupt relationship" between Schabir Shaik and Jacob Zuma.

Unless editors are vigilant, there will be many more such problems – exacerbated by the pressures of 24/7 publishing. This is a clear case of where change can threaten important editorial values, unless media leaders underline the importance of the journalistic standards that need preserving.

> We don't hire editors any more, we hire content strategists.

– Jack Griffin, president of Meredith Publishing, in keynote speech at the 2008 FOLIO: Publishing Summit (February 21 2008).

Record of understanding

Record of understanding between
THE MINISTER OF JUSTICE
and THE MINISTER OF SAFETY AND SECURITY
and THE NATIONAL DIRECTOR OF PUBLIC PROSECUTIONS
and SOUTH AFRICAN NATIONAL EDITORS' FORUM

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1. This record of understanding is the outcome of discussions between the Minister of Justice, the Minister of Safety and Security, the national Director of Public Prosecutions (hereinafter referred to as the National Director) and the South African National Editors' Forum concerning the issues pertaining to the duty of every citizen or everyone else subject to the Constitution to testify regarding his or her knowledge of the commission of crime as well as the protection of journalists' sources and information.
1.2. The Minister of Justice, the Minister of Safety and Security and the National Director on the one hand and the South African National Editors' Forum on behalf of the press and the media on the other hand have reached an understanding with regard to the implementation of the existing laws relative to the duty to testify and the protection of journalists' sources and information which understanding they hereby record.

2. PRINCIPLES

All parties hereto accept –
2.1. the supremacy of the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa 1996, (Act 108 of 1996), and the rule of law;
2.2 that the maintenance of law and order and the administration of justice in the Republic of South Africa are the responsibility of the State, all the citizens of this land including the members of the press and media and everyone else subject to the Constitution;
2.3. that unless there exist special grounds, in the interest of the maintenance of law and order and the administration of justice, it is the duty of every citizen and every one else subject to the Constitution, to testify and give evidence of his or her knowledge of a crime, when called upon to do so by the State;
2.4. that the press and the media in a democratic society and a right have a duty, in the public interest, to collect and disseminate newsworthy information and in order to exercise this right and duty it is necessary, under appropriate circumstances, that their sources and information should be protected; and
2.5. that there is a need to balance the interests of the maintenance of law and order and the administration of justice on the one hand with the right of freedom of expression and specifically freedom of the press and media.

3. CONTINUING NEGOTIATIONS

3.1. The parties, including the press and the media, recognize that it is necessary to retain the provisions in our law in terms of which persons may be called to court to disclose information which may be required for the effective administration of justice, which would include, but not limited to, section 179 and section 205 of the Criminal Procedure Act, 1977 (Act 51 of 1977).
3.2. However, the parties also recognize that it is in the interest of the State, the press,

the media and the community if the principles referred to in paragraph 2 above are clearly defined in our laws.
3.3. The parties accordingly agree to urgently investigate the possibility and desirability to amend the Criminal Procedure Act, 1977, so as to incorporate the abovementioned principles and they agree to continue with the present negotiations.

4. INTERIM ARRANGEMENT

Pending finalization of the investigation referred to in paragraph 3.3, the Minister of Justice, the Minister of Safety and Security and the National Director are prepared to accommodate the concerns of the press and the media by implementing the following procedures to be applicable when a subpoena is caused to be issued by the State in respect of the press and the media:
4.1. When the prosecuting authority or an official under the authority of the Minister of Safety and Security wishes to compel a member of the press or the media to testify or deliver documents in relation to information obtained by that person for the purpose of publication in the press or the media, the matter shall at the request of the member of the press or the media be referred to the National Director of Public Prosecutions for consideration.
4.2. The National Director shall afford the person referred to in paragraph 4.1 or his or her representative and any other interested party the opportunity to make representations to the National Director and the National Director may initiate a process of mediation and negotiation between all the relevant stakeholders in an attempt to resolve a particular dispute or disputes in an attempt to avoid legal proceedings in respect of the issue of testifying or delivering documents.
4.3. After the process referred to in paragraph 4.2 above, the National Director undertakes to make a determination with regard to the issuing of the subpoena by weighing the need to uphold the maintenance of law and order and the administration of justice against the right of freedom of expression and freedom of the press and the media.
4.4. The South African National Editors' Forum will utilise its best endeavours to ensure that its members comply with this interim arrangement and further agrees to use its best endeavours to ensure that matters are settled in accordance with the principles set out in paragraph 2 above.
4.5. The procedures described in this paragraph shall not deprive any party to revert to the normal legal process if a subpoena is issued after the conclusion of procedures.
4.6. Nothing contained in this document shall be interpreted so as to interfere with the judiciary or with any lawful power or competency that may be exercised by the judiciary.

DATED at CAPE TOWN this the 19th day of February 1999.

(Signed by Dullah Omar) MINISTER OF JUSTICE

(Signed on behalf of the Minister by Azalia Cachalia)
MINISTER OF SAFETY AND SECURITY

(Signed by Bulelani Ngcuka)
NATIONAL DIRECTOR OF PUBLIC PROSECUTIONS

(Signed by Moegsien Williams)
SANEF VICE CHAIRMAN

Sanef Guidelines on Confidential briefings and sources

Adopted at Sanef Council, 30 May 2004, Durban.

General principles:

Sanef stands for values of openness, transparency, non-racialism and the public interest, and this informs our approach to confidential briefings whether given to a group or an individual journalist.

In general, on-the-record information sources are desirable. Efforts should be made to get anonymous sources to go on-the-record. Anonymous sources should generally be used only as a last resort – i.e. when there is no other way to get and publish the story. Anonymous sources should not be used routinely in minor stories or to cover up lazy reporting.

Multisourcing is preferable where sources set "off-the-record" conditions. Anonymous sources should have direct knowledge and evidence of the story, and independent checking of their information is strongly recommended. Editor-level approval should be required for use of anonymous sources. The question of then identifying the source to the editor is a distinct issue which depends on the institution's policy.

A story should usually indicate in its contents the reason why the source wishes to remain anonymous. Whatever commitment a journalist has given a source should ethically bind that journalist. There may be exceptions such as if the information turns out to have been given with malicious intent or inclusion of deliberate falsehoods. However, qualifying a commitment to confidentiality in this manner ought to be made clear to the source at the outset.

Sanef members should be sensitive to the possible implications of attending off-the-record briefings convened along selective lines such as race, or hand-picked briefings convened by public officials whose job requires them to be even-handed in regard to all media.

Checklist of questions journalists should consider when dealing with confidential sourcing:

1. Are the terms of the briefing or interview clarified before it begins?
2. If the source wants it "off the record" at either the outset, or asks for this to commence at a later point in the proceedings, are you prepared to begin immediate negotiations on this?
3. Are you asking yourself the following questions:
   - Does the source supplying the information/briefing need the media more than vice versa?
   - Are you as a journalist using the source (in the interests of informing the public), or is the source using you for a different agenda? What is that agenda? What information is the source likely to be leaving out of the briefing? Can you, rather than the source, set the terms of the engagement?
4. Consider these options:
   - If the source argues for the briefing to be "confidential" in one form or another, is this absolutely necessary? Can you persuade him or her to go "on the record" before or after the engagement? Can you convince the person to take named responsibility for the sake of credibility of the story and veracity of the information?

- Have you assessed how much trust and reliability is there in the relationship, before agreeing to confidentiality?
- Are both the contents of the briefing, as well as the fact of its occurrence, supposed to be "confidential"? Does the source realise whether this is practical or not?
- If the source is not savvy, do you have a responsibility to explain the implications of his or her name going into the media? Are there legitimate reasons why the source should be advised to operate in confidence?

5. If the source speaks "on-the-record" and then retrospectively declares something "off-the-record", you must argue that this was not agreed by you beforehand, and that it is therefore something that you are not bound to respect.
6. If the confidential engagement is agreed (in advance) as being "off-the-record", "background", or "deep background", etc., is the meaning of these words mutually understood and agreed? In particular, do they mean either one of two things: "not for attribution" or "not for use"?
   a. "Not for attribution" – i.e. the information may be used but not attributed to the particular source:
      i. In such a case, is the precise public form of the sourcing – eg. "a source close to the Minister" - agreed by both parties?
      ii. Is it possible to increase the credibility of the source by getting as close an identification as possible without jeopardising the individual (eg. an "official in the Presidency", not just "a government source")?
   b "Not for use" – i.e. the information may not be used:
      i. In such a case, may the info still be followed up independently through pursuing other avenues?
      ii. If not, is it possible to point out to the source that no point is served by the briefing if the information or perspective given is not to have some manifestation in the media?
      iii. If not, is it possible to go back to the source at a later point and persuade him/her to drop the restrictions? Will changing situations affect the status of the information and enable you to re-negotiate?
      iv. If the source begins to touch on information which you already possess, and you do not want to be bound by "not-for-use-nor-for-independent-follow-up", are you ready to promptly and explicitly terminate your participation in the confidential briefing/interview or particular phase thereof?
7. Does the source know whether you may need to disclose his or her identity to your editor?
8. Does the source require that he or she can see your story before publication and have veto rights over what you will publish? Do you know your newsroom's policy on this?
9. Are you abiding by professional ethics and respecting the terms of a commitment to confidentiality which you have given in the name of journalism?
10. Is your negotiation on confidentiality really the best deal that can be secured for the public interest? Will you be able to defend your participation in it if the need ever arises?

MEDIA DEVELOPMENT & DIVERSITY AGENCY

Introduction

The MDDA was established in terms of the MDDA Act, 2002 (Act 14 of 2002), which provides for the establishment of an independent, statutory body, jointly funded in partnership between the government, the media industry and other donors.

The MDDA Act, 2002 was enacted after extensive discussion with major media players who agreed to jointly fund such an agency with government to facilitate and promote media development and diversity. The MDDA is tasked with creating an enabling environment for media diversity and development by providing support to media projects, and facilitating research into media development and diversity issues. The agency functions independently from and at arm's length of its funders, political- party and commercial interests. This arrangement enables a public private partnership to work together in addressing the legacy of imbalances in access to, ownership and control of the media.

The MDDA helps create an enabling environment for media development and diversity that is conducive to public discourse and which reflects the needs and aspirations of South Africans.

Description

The Constitution Act No. 108 of 1996, in sections 16 and 32 (under Chapter 2, Bill of Rights) provides for the freedom of expression and access to information. To deepen media diversity, government, together with commercial media entities, partnered in order to assist the establishment of the Media Development and Diversity Agency (MDDA), which is tasked with (amongst other things) providing financial and other support to community and small commercial media projects.

The MDDA is therefore a development agency that will assist in building an environment where a diverse, vibrant and creative media flourishes and reflects the needs of all South Africans.

The MDDA works primarily with historically disadvantaged persons and communities; priority in the years ahead is especially going to focus on rural and poor areas outside of Gauteng and the Western Cape and historically diminished language and cultural groups, and inadequately served communities. This does not therefore mean at the exclusion of these provinces (i.e. Gauteng and Western Cape).

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Main services, programmes, projects and initiatives

The purpose of the MDDA programs is to "strengthen the sector though the provision of resources, knowledge and skills in pursuit of promoting media development and diversity"

The MDDA pursues its mandate through;

- The provision of grants and subsidies to media projects and the promotion of media development and diversity
- Leveraging resources and support through technical assistance
- Conducting and funding research
- Facilitating capacity building
- Advocating for media diversity

In this context, the MDDA will in the ensuing period, focus its work on advocacy for the alternative sector, giving grants and seed funding support for the newly licensed community radio stations in the nodal areas, for both small commercial print media and community media projects, capacity building interventions with beneficiaries including mentorship and monitoring and evaluation, research and increasing knowledge of the MDDA to better structure program intervention and innovation, stakeholder management and resource mobilisation. Monitoring and Evaluation will play a key role in structuring future program involvement, design and development.

Interventions in the print media sector include addressing printing and distribution challenges by assisting in the setting up of provincial hubs where resources can be shared amongst projects.

Accordingly, the Agency has set itself the following indicators for the years ahead, in terms of its mandate in the promotion and strengthening small commercial print and community media:

- At least 1 community radio per district municipality funded
- At least 1 community newspaper per district municipality funded
- At least 1 community television per province funded
- 1 media co-operative per district funded guided by the feasibility study on the viability of co-operatives
- At least 1 multimedia hub per province (print & radio) funded
- Fund student media, atypical media, new media and content development initiatives
- Fund a spread of small commercial newspapers, magazines, online newspapers or magazines.

mdda
MEDIA DEVELOPMENT & DIVERSITY AGENCY

The Association of Independent Publishers (AIP) is the region's largest 'union' for independent and grassroots publishers.

Founded as a self-help association, AIP is dedicated to growing the diversity and pluralism of the region's grassroots media by proactively improving the editorial quality and commercial sustainability of independent publications.

AIP seeks to achieve this by focusing on the business of publishing.

Good content is good business. AIP believes that the only sustainable way to consistently get good content is to invest in the people and systems that produce it.

AIP therefore champions projects such as this newsroom management manual in a bid to improve both the quality of content published in independent media, as well as the calibre of the media managers who produce it.

This manual forms part of AIP's Newspaper-in-a-Box (NiB) project, which seeks to give even the smallest publications access to the same kinds of support systems, automated production software, and management toolkits that larger media enjoy.

Other newsroom management books in NiB include the Reporting the Courts guidebooks.

With members throughout the Southern African Development Community (SADC), AIP affiliate publications include everything from deep rural newspapers printed on hand-operated presses, to international-standard glossy magazines, and everything inbetween.

To find out about AIP's other programmes, visit www.independentpublisher.org

ASSOCIATION OF
INDEPENDENT PUBLISHERS

Konrad Adenauer Stiftung

The KAS and its media programme sub-Sahara Africa

For over 40 years now, the German Konrad Adenauer Foundation (KAS) has been engaged with Africa. Named after Germany´s first democratic chancellor after World War II, the foundation has worked at its many offices around Africa to strengthen democracy, build good political governance and buttress a free media. To reach these goals, KAS runs offices in over 100 countries around the world.

Since 2002 the foundation has added a regional media programme for sub-Sahara Africa, which is based in Johannesburg. The major task of this programme has been the building and strengthening of independent news media in the region. To achieve this goal, KAS media offers a variety of courses, training workshops, publications and conferences.

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Words for Africa

Every day, millions of South Africans look to Media24's titles for news, information, advice and entertainment. And while each title may differ in character, they all have the ability to touch people through the power of words.

As Africa's leading publisher of the written word, Media24 has interests in newspapers, magazines, digital businesses, book publishing, print and distribution companies.

Media24 Newspapers publishes almost 60 titles and about 341.8 million newspapers annually, many of which are leaders in their respective markets.

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