

harried editor is plagued by a punctuation mark that won't stay put? How can anyone focus on quality of content when everything looks fine on-screen but comes out of the printer skewed?

Other Views

1. Washington Journalism Review: WJR pres/journalism dean U of Maryland Reese Cleghorn told pr that eds are victims of an evolutionary sweep. "It's an irony -- computers should give us more control, eventually they'll turn out to be a great asset. But for now, they burden editors with more tasks than ever before." Reese suggests reinstating the production mgr, whose role dissolved when computers came on the scene.
2. CASE Currents says old solutions don't work with new tech. "Desktop publishing tends to change the skills your office needs. The traditional roles grow fuzzy. As one manager says, 'Designers must do editing, editors must do design. It can get to be a real circus.'"

Cleghorn: "Editors have always been a lonely breed & today they're an endangered species. Electronic newsrooms have reduced many copy eds to clerical work: coding for type space & width, formatting, & in effect, typesetting & proof-reading. They lack the time the green eyeshaders on the rim once had -- at least in non-peak hours -- to question the facts, challenge the word use & structure, chop the weeds & work empathetically with writers to improve copy -- not to mention the time to fashion accurate, compelling heads."

No wonder journalists comprise a miserable lot (pr 1/16). And no wonder forthcoming study by the American Society of Newspaper Eds finds copy eds a gloomy group, forever complaining of computer production, pay level & difficult work schedules. Bear with us as we work out the kinks. We'll share our solutions -- if there are any.

ITEM OF INTEREST FOR PRACTITIONERS

¶ Flack You To You, Too. Study ranking undergraduate pr sequences wasn't esteemed by the Washington Post (pr 5/8). Last Monday it ran an item about it titled "Flack U." Most interesting for Post readers was that nearby U of Maryland led the pack. Column went on to say that the school "naturally touted this with a press release..." A number of DC practitioners are upset.

WHO'S WHO IN PUBLIC RELATIONS

ELECTED. 1990-91 president of NSPRA will be Bob Grossman, dir info, Montgomery (Md.) Public Schools. Previously dpr at Los Angeles County & Columbus (O) schools. NSPRA elects its officers by direct balloting among members.

HONORS. Lyle Barker, Ohio State U pr prof, receives Outstanding Practitioner Award (PRISM) from PRSA/Central Ohio. Gen. Barker retired as Army Chief of Public Affairs in '84.

PROBLEMS CAUSED BY FATAL SHOOTING OF EMPLOYEE, PART II -- FORMER EMPLOYER ALSO HAD TO FACE MEDIA, PROTECT REPUTATION; INTENSIFIED BY PRESENT EMPLOYER'S EFFECTIVE DISTANCING

Drury College (Springfield, Mo) wasn't the only one called upon to answer for the off-hours aberration of an employee, fatally shot while trying to attack a tv anchorwoman in her home (pr 5/22). Southwest Missouri State Univ, the dead man's former employer & alma mater, also had to mount a defense. Dpr Paul Kincaid says while Drury's "distancing" effectively kept it out of the spotlight, it swept problems onto SMSU's doorstep.

Situation was stickier for SMSU. 9 years ago, its campus security had: apprehended the attacker for window peeping; received signed statement confessing to a "sickness"; counseled him. Records were sealed & stored. When Drury called for references on this new prospective employee, it was not made privy to the incident. Kincaid explains: "Family Educational Rights & Privacy Act protects student records from being disclosed to a 3rd party. Legally, info couldn't even go into personnel file; as a part-time employee, he didn't have a regular personnel file anyway." Thus, those giving references had no knowledge of the '80 incident.

Goals (in order of priority): a) cooperate with police; b) protect rights of the deceased according to FERPA; c) minimize pr damage to SMSU.

"We are not a law enforcement agency. Those in higher ed pr work with FERPA as those in financial pr work with disclosure law. Legal counsel warned of fine line to walk to accomplish our 3 goals."

Complicating Factors 1. Key players changed: nearly a decade passed between the window peeping & shooting. Prez, vp student affairs, security dir, counselors were gone. "I had to surmise the rationale of people I didn't even know, involving a situation that had occurred 6 years before I came to campus."

1989 Values Applied To 1980 Incident: "Attitudes about child abuse, spouse abuse, date rape, sexual harassment, etc. changed. Window peeping was not considered serious in '80, especially for someone with an otherwise impeccable background, but I would never bring this up to the public or media for fear of seeming to minimize the incident. As Philip Lesly says, the human climate is constantly changing."

2. Report leaked: by tv station before police investigation was complete, despite prosecutor's request to hold it. "Because of FERPA & investigation, I spent 24 hours telling media I couldn't confirm or deny."
3. FERPA restrictions: "You learn from Day One that to be a credible & trusted pr professional, you must be fast & complete with bad news as well as good. In this case, full disclosure was not possible without violating a federal law that protects an individual's freedom."
4. Higher ed's "second chance" philosophy: "Colleges give second chances to hundreds of thousands of students who are basically good people. The philosophy is that 17, 18, & 19-yr olds are still developing, shouldn't be branded for life because of 1 mistake. 99% turn these extra chances into a positive springboard. 1%, as in this case, come back to haunt you."

Special Strategies Besides One Clear Voice single contact, SMSU maintained constant comm with legal counsel. Also: a) practiced fielding various types of questions; b) remained accessible to the media but issued no official statement until after police news conference; c) avoided 20/20 hindsight. "We would not judge decisions made by our predecessors"; d) SMSU would not take blame for the crime. Tho responsible for handling the '80 incident & policies re disclosure of student info, "SMSU didn't break into an apartment & attack an anchorwoman."

Result Some media criticism & negative public opinion, but no letters to the editor about SMSU's role in the incident. Besides, satisfying media & public was not first priority. "We used the incident to improve relations with police. Also, protected student's rights & abided by FERPA law. We were about as successful as could be expected."

Afterthoughts: More was learned about philosophy than techniques.

¶ PR consists of deeds, not words. We fight so hard to be treated as part of the mgmt team so we can shape decisions which will last a lifetime & strengthen long-term pr efforts. In this case, our pr posture & strategy were determined almost a decade earlier.

¶ Review key policies periodically. As a result of this incident, we fine tuned some of our policies, especially those involving the police dep't.

¶ The organization is the organization. You cannot hide from accountability because the people in charge have changed.

¶ Take references seriously, whether giving or receiving them. When serving as a reference, don't overstate, don't move out of your sphere of knowledge about the person...consider how you should present negative material -- excessive drinking, excessive absences, use of profanity, sexual harassment, misuse of funds, etc. When you check references, go beyond those listed on the resume & find ways to ask questions that effectively get at sensitive subjects.

WILL SUPERVISORS SABOTAGE SWITCH TO GREATER EMPLOYEE INVOLVEMENT? Employees comprise a rich source of info -- they are the organization -- so increasingly organizations are abandoning the top-down management style to solicit their input in decision-making. Upcoming report from Work In America Institute warns these overhauls often snafu because of supervisors & mid-level managers. Suddenly expected to be "coaches" or "advisors" instead of "bosses," they sense an erosion of their power base & job security, end up opposing the change.

This is a major reason for downsizing middle managers, flattening the organization. Will recognizing & addressing supers' critical roles avoid this mindset, which ultimately blocks progress? Or will work groups become increasingly self-governing? Institute suggests:

A. Retain the managerial title. Increased employee involvement doesn't mean decreased accountability for the super. If anything goes wrong, s/he still must answer to senior mgmt. Supers should retain title of "manager" rather than "coordinator" or "advisor," & should be trained to lead workers, set challenging goals for them, not serve them. (Advocates of team-style org'ns & the "customer" concept would disagree with the last part.)

B. When group starts to manage itself, expand the supervisor's role. When a supervisor's managerial role becomes superfluous, delegate other responsibilities to them, e.g. cost reduction, customer satisfaction, etc.

Report is part of policy study, "New Roles For Managers" due next year. (For more info, contact Frances Harte, WIAI, 700 White Plains Rd, Scarsdale, NY; 10583 914/472-9600.)

COMPUTERS IN PUBLISHING: GODSEND OR NIGHTMARE? Over the past few weeks, pr readers may have detected some inconsistencies in the appearance of our publication. Without going into gruesome detail, let us simply say we're sorry if we have caused you confusion -- we're undergoing a transition in our computer system.

Our dilemma underscores a problem prevailing everywhere: what's a publisher to do when enslaved by a software package? If all goes well, using a word processor or desktop publishing kit is undeniably preferable to pounding on the old Selectric II. But if there's a glitch, the entire production staff goes spiraling into hell. How can an editor concentrate on crafting copy when s/he must worry about invisible page ends, faulty line adjustments & strange codes? Who will give copy much-needed punch if the

What historically was "management" & "labor" is now "senior mgmt.", "middle mgmt" & "employees." At American Cyanamid plant, (Niagara Falls, Ont), supervisors were hand-picked by senior mgmt to help bring about more employee involvement. They backed away when colleagues attacked them as having been brainwashed by "management." Company tried a new tack -- inviting the plant's 60 supervisors to nominate 9 reps to take part in planning the changeover. That resulted in cooperation & trust.