

# 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 fam-

ily 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

Soccer game: 9am Saturday

Agenda for diversity meeting

Perf mgmt with Thabo 10 mins?

Do email 9am Noon 3pm } 15 mins

Head hunt Political Editor

Birthday present for gogo

Wed 3pm Strategy dead line

80% of work generates 20% of value!

# 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.

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-

## Tips on time management

Measuring time on the 24/7 clock is a modern phenomenon, like treating it as a

### 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



meeting without registering outcomes

allow for it. Instead, it is using your team at the appropriate levels of responsibility.

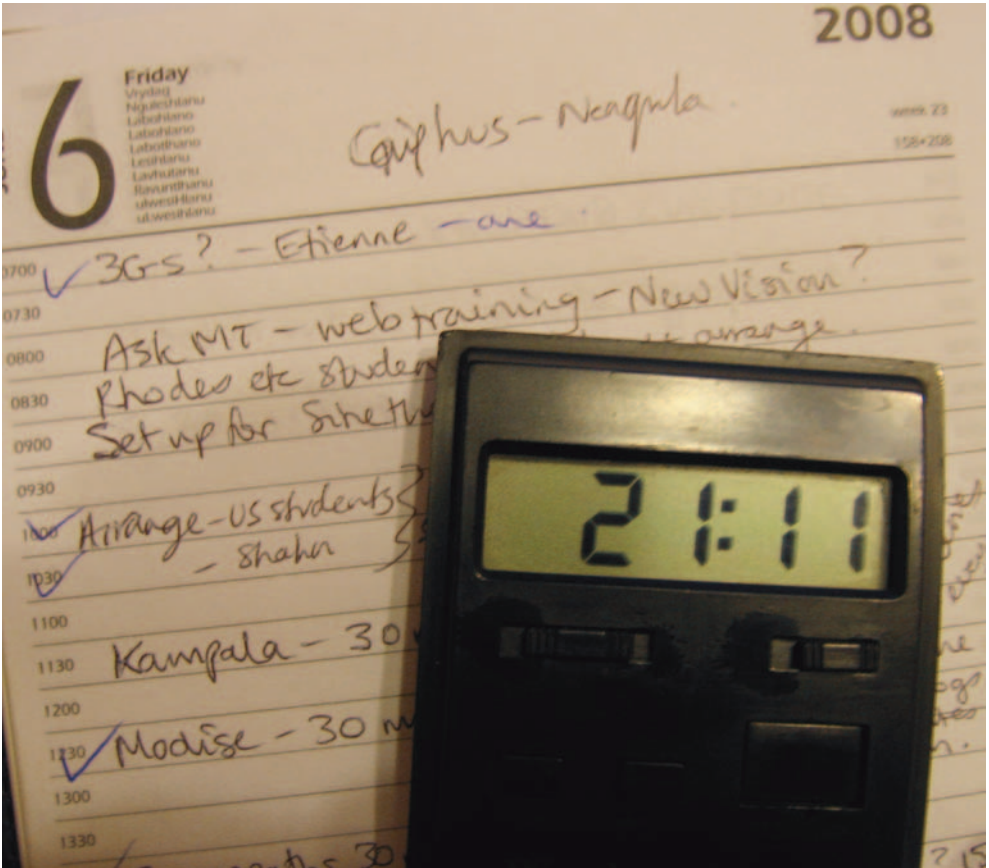
- Don't procrastinate over unpleasant tasks: schedule them high in your to-do list; use the nice stuff as your reward for completion.
- Get your kicks from achieving a lot over a longer period, rather than from the transient pleasure of results under extreme pressure.
- Bunch your tasks: like doing email 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

#### 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
- 6 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).
- 7 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.

### 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.)*

- 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?

## 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

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

### 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



**GETTING ORGANISED**

# Why you need a good PA

**T**oo 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](http://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](http://www.mg.co.za), [www.sabcnews.com](http://www.sabcnews.com), [www.news24.com](http://www.news24.com) and [www.iol.co.za](http://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).

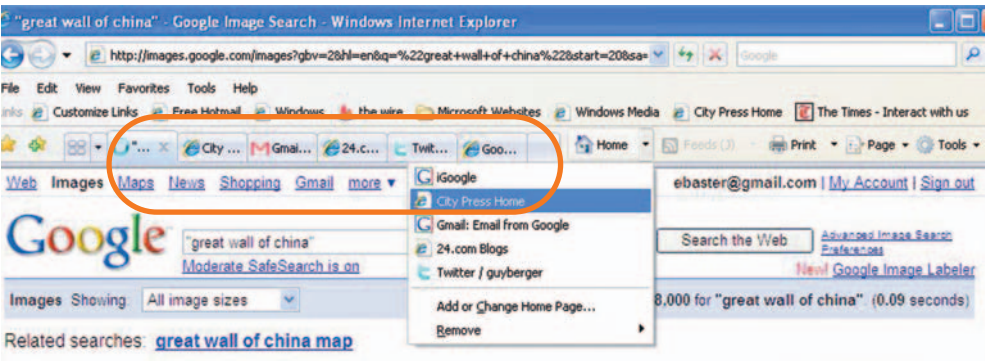
Any site will advise you if it offers RSS by showing a little orange icon on the pages, and sometimes in the internet address line at the top of your browser.

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

- Via your web browser (for example Explorer, Firefox).
- Via your email.
- 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](http://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](http://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

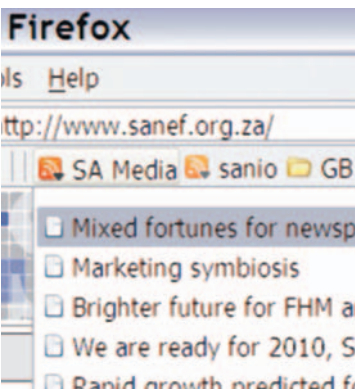
This facility enables you to schedule and be reminded about meetings in a way that maximises your organisational effectiveness.

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

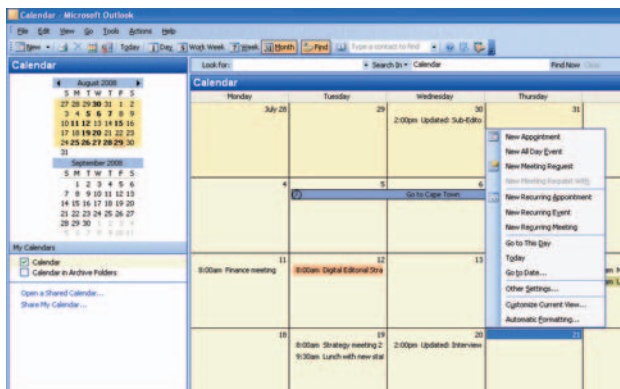
### Stay ahead – know the jargon

Twitter. Delicious. Digg. Dooood. RSS. Mashup. Microblogging ...

You can find out the meanings at: [http://www.converstations.com/blog-ging\\_glossary.html](http://www.converstations.com/blog-ging_glossary.html) – *Guy Berger*



RSS feeds in Firefox.



For meeting reminders, use the Outlook calendar.

# 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.

## 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



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



## 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.

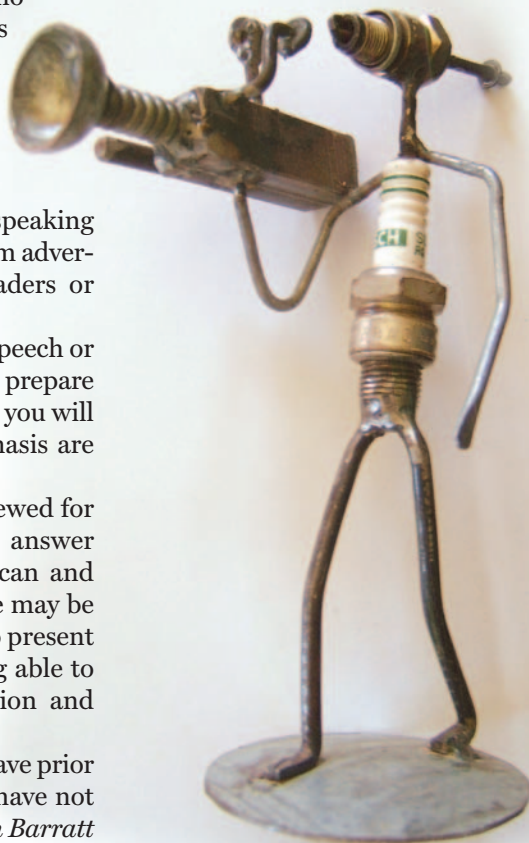
Yet he or she is presumably not aware of creating these distractions.

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



**At work in the Sanef office.**

media if certain clauses are accepted. In this way Sanef has helped keep a serious threat to media freedom at bay.

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.

# 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 workaholicism. 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 digital 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

**E**ditorships 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*

**W**hen 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 spoils 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 Dlodlu**

Former *Sowetan* editor (2002 to 2004)

**C**areer 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.

“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.

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

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