

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

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.



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 head-hunting suitable applicants.
- Having a strong interviewing (and, where possible, testing) process.

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.

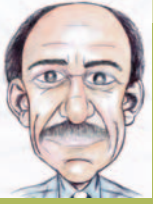
12 Decide on what is needed for induction or early training with the candidate, and who will do it.

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 rea-

soning 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

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.”

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 Marquez, 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 air-time 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.

“
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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.

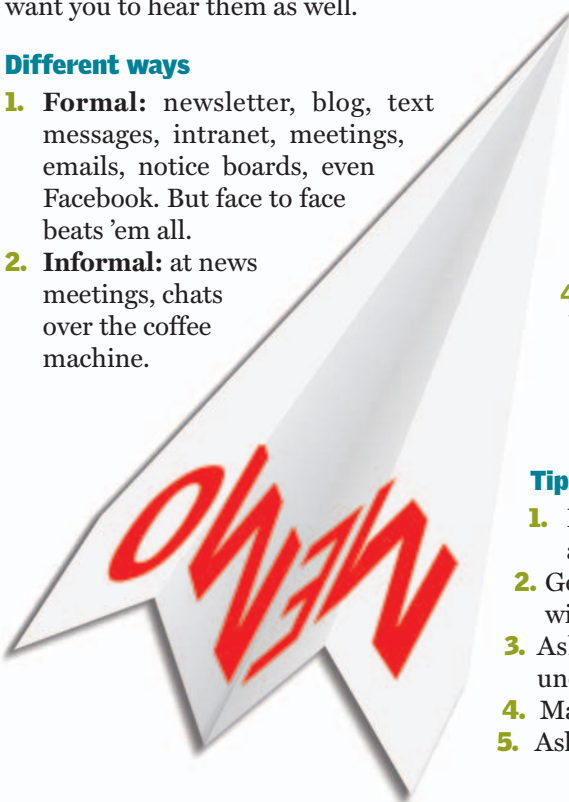
The aims of communication

- 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 acces-

sible, 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.)

CONFIGURING CONFLICT

- 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.

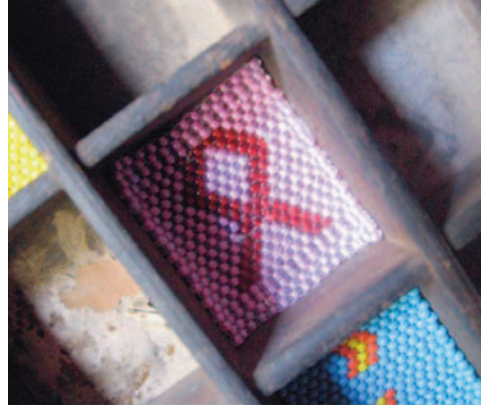
In 2004, the Media Institute of Southern Africa (Misa) surveyed 10 SADC countries and found that 80% of media institutions had neither an Aids policy in place nor editorial guidelines on reportage.

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 rela-

tionship, 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-retrovi-

rals 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 con-

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.

duct 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 –

MY EXPERIENCE

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 pol-

icy 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

BY STAFF REPORTER

Former *City Press* editor Vusi Mona, after being

**We stand by our story
on Ngcuka allegations**

...ing the confidentiality com-
m, namely that he felt it was
itizen's duty

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 eas-

ier 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 per-

formance 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.

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

DON'T BE CAUGHT NAPPING:

Find out if your company has an affirmative action or empowerment policy concerning gender.

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

REFERENCES

Dealing with gender issues

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● *The glass ceiling and beyond*. A report by Sanef’s diversity sub-committee, 2006 (at: <http://www.sanef.org.za/diversity/>).

● *Lessons on mentoring for white male news editors*, by Bonnie Pfister, available at <http://www.womensenews.org/article.cfm/dyn/aid/110/context/archive>

● *Women in Newspapers – how much progress has been made?* A report for the Media Management Center of Northwestern University, by Mary Arnold Hemlinger.

● *Women in Media 2006 – finding the leader in you*. A report for the Media Management Center at Northwestern University, by Mary Arnold and Mary Nesbitt.

● *Status of Women Journalists in the Print Media in India* by the Press Institute of India – available at <http://osdir.com/ml/culture.region.india.zes.tmedia/2005-09/msg00021.html>

● 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 brainstorming, 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 prejudice 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 news-room 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

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.

OR THE IDEA OF RACE LEADS TO RACISM

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

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.

OR RACE IS TYRANNY

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

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").

OR RACE IS ABOUT DIVISION

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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<http://www.sahrc.org.za>
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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

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)

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

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.

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

W 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

W I did this because I had been thrown in at the deep end. W

could set your own editorial-to-advertising mix simply by diktat with scarce account of weekly revenues.

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 chock-full 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 com-

municate 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

What's the story? Why?

Tell me more.

Where is the greatest interest?

Let me see if I understand you; do you mean _____ or _____?

Can we break this down at all?

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

What can we assume the audience already knows about this?

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.

Would that necessarily happen, or only possibly/probably happen?

Who can you talk to about this story?

What would be another other way of presenting this specific aspect?

What works, and what needs work, with this story? What about paragraph x?

What's your next step?

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/%7Eepelitz/classes/1004/1004resources/critiquing.html).

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)*