

LEADERSHIP





A day of pride for newspapers

BY ORAGE QUARLES III

While watching events unfold yesterday, Sept. 11, 2001, I knew that newspapers once again would have the opportunity to bring the meaning of a tragedy home by presenting the local perspective.

In an early discussion with our editor, Anders Gyllenhaal, I made it clear that he was to use the space necessary to help our readers understand what was happening and what the impact was here in the Triangle region of North Carolina.

With a great team effort, we were able to produce a first-class special edition that hit the streets just before 4 p.m. The special edition was the first by this newspaper since the bombing of Pearl Harbor.

With the help of rack cards, radio, word of mouth and some free promotion from local television stations, we sold more than 20,000 copies. E-mail and phone calls confirmed that we had made the right decision. Readers were shocked that their local newspaper could produce such a high-quality,

informative product in such a short time.

With Internet and phone lines tied up and television stations repeating much of their coverage, our report offered clear advantages. It included strong graphics, analysis and commentary, along with coverage from Raleigh-Durham International Airport and local, state and federal offices.

Sept. 11 will never be forgotten. I can't remember, in my 30 years plus in the business, being more proud of a group of folks who worked together to produce news and information that could help our community deal with events.

As I walked around downtown and noticed all the empty news racks, I was reminded once again of the power and importance of the printed page.

Orage Quarles III is president and publisher of The News & Observer in Raleigh, N.C., and is chairman of the Newspaper Association of America.

I prayed for wisdom

BY TIM MCGUIRE

At 4 p.m. on Sept. 11, 2001, I went into the Star Tribune men's room. I entered stall number one. I sat down. Then I prayed.

I prayed for all the victims of the horrible World Trade Center and Pentagon massacres. I prayed for the families of those victims. I prayed for everyone trying to cope with that tragedy. I prayed for the people who had committed this horrible act. I prayed that I might understand how and why anyone could hate the United States so much. And I prayed for wisdom.

I emerged from my three or four minutes of prayer and, without missing a beat, continued my daylong effort to mobilize and catalyze my news staff.

They were great, and I'm incredibly proud of how well we all did. But when journalists are working at top efficiency, on the story of our lives, our emotions are not like the emotions of "real people." We become almost ashamed of how divorced we are from the suffering. And then: Bam! You see something on television or truly absorb the impact of a story you're reading, and you drown in empathy, sympathy and dread.

There is no need to be ashamed by our distance.

Our focus had to be on doing our job out of a sense of the common good. We were charged with delivering the news and perspective on this tragedy to a hungry readership. If we got too close to the pain, it would have impaired our ability to do what we had to do for the greater good.

In my speech accepting the presidency of ASNE, I said being an editor of a newspaper is a true blessing and a privilege. I said, "Our opportunities to do good, to stimulate debate and discussion, and to supply the glue of our communities make what we do far more than a job, it's a calling."

A calling "links a person to a whole in which the calling of each is a contribution to all," writes Robert Bellah, in his book "Habits of the Heart." That is the common good.

When we were attempting to bury our feelings last week to serve our readers, we were only responding to our calling.

We won't be able to bury those feelings forever. That's why I pray for wisdom.

Tim McGuire is president of the American Society of Newspaper Editors. He is editor and vice president of the Star Tribune in Minneapolis.





Reflections on Leadership

Preparing for the long run

EDWARD D. MILLER

As we enter Week Three of the terrorism stories, we ought to consider how long we can sustain the pace.

I have been in Europe conducting management workshops since Sept. 7 and won't return stateside until later this week, so my contact with U.S. newsrooms has been limited. Nevertheless, two messages have come through clearly from friends and colleagues:

Fatigue is setting in. How can we keep up the pace?

Coverage of this story will go on for years. Should we organize the newsroom any differently to handle a long-term commitment?

Let me offer several thoughts that might help editors organize and pace themselves:

1. Acknowledge journalism's short attention span. Walter Lippmann took up this point decades ago:

"The press is an unreliable instrument for governing because it can't keep its mind on anything very long. It is like the beam of a searchlight that moves restlessly about, bringing in one episode and then another out of the darkness into vision. You cannot govern society by episode, incidents, and eruptions."

Clearly this story will focus our attention, but we need to remind ourselves that journalism is not accustomed to consistent, long-term focus on anything. Since Watergate and Vietnam, we have had little practice planning coverage of long-running stories.

I have no doubt that newsrooms can bring the searchlight into sustained focus on this story. But please remember as we get started on this marathon: We're sprinters at heart; we haven't trained ourselves for distance running.

2. Recognize that we are better at reacting than initiating. Even from my distant vantage point in Europe, I could watch America's newspapers respond quickly, effectively and with distinction during the early hours and days of the

crisis. It's what we do best, and on this story, I've seen evidence of just how distinguished our best can be.

But assets can be liabilities; our obvious instincts and talents for reacting to breaking news may interfere with the very different skills required to sustain long-haul coverage.

We can learn to initiate as well as we react, but it's a transition that requires careful preparation and constant practice.

3. Remember what we do know about collaboration. If any story requires the effective integration of all our crafts, this one is it.

Coordinated research will be essential to sift and pass on the many channels of information coming to us from wire services and other media.

Idea generation will have to be more systematic. A lot of assignments will be obvious, but limited resources will force newsrooms to make some tough decisions. A small but skilled idea-generation team can help expand the pool of project ideas so editors can make more informed choices about where to commit resources.

Teams of talented journalists should be given broad, long-term responsibilities for important segments of this story. Two of the many segments that could be handled this way are: 1) the short- and long-term economic impact, both nationally and locally, and 2) the international involvement in this war on terrorism. If my isolated post in Europe during these weeks had any advantage, it was to see first-hand how this is not just America's story.

4. Don't be afraid to create new tools of management. Trust the instincts and skills that have served you well on breaking stories, but be inventive and flexible about gearing up for the long run. Hold newsroom-wide conversations about how to pursue and manage this story. Invite outsiders into the conversations; authors, engineers, architects, and even local bureaucrats know a lot about staying focused while

Continued on next page



Continued from previous page

managing long-term projects. And be creative about using your Web site. It can be an important two-way link with readers to gather ideas and information.

Planning for a long-running story is quite different from reacting to breaking news. One challenge is fighting fatigue; another is sustaining focus. I have no doubt editors will learn to handle both.

Help me help others: If you have any ideas on how newsrooms can fight fatigue and maintain focus, e-mail them to me. I will collect and pass them along in subsequent essays and post them on the Web site.

The archive is open: You can find more than 65 previously published essays

on newsroom management at www.newsroomleadership.com

Add a friend? If you would like to add any of your colleagues to the weekly "Reflections" e-mail list, simply send me names, titles and e-mail addresses. The service is free, and there are no commercial messages, not even my own. Send as many names as you like.

© Edward D. Miller 2001

Ed Miller, a former newspaper editor and publisher, writes a weekly e-mail column, "Reflections on Leadership."

The role of the editor: 'To lead, not to do'

BY LINDA CUNNINGHAM

When there's a breaking news story that commands the big headline, journalists get juiced.

Editors who haven't seen the inside of a weekend newsroom in a decade roam the room. Others who traded the assignment desk for the executive hall find themselves editing copy, selecting photos, tinkering with the lead headline. We can couch our rush any way we want for the public, but we like those days. For editors, especially those at the top, the big story offers a great excuse to roll up the proverbial sleeves and prove to the staff that we can still do the work.

The lure of being in a newsroom on a breaking story is irresistible. There was no way, on Sept. 11 and for days thereafter, that we weren't going to be at our own newsrooms' "ground zero."

With apologies to the smallest among us where top editors usually have to write the lead headlines (and the

briefs), the rest of us may need to assess our newsroom roles in breaking-news coverage.

Our role is to lead, not to do. We set the tone, fight for the resources, ensure work is spread among those who can do it best, serve as the sounding board, re-adjust the direction, settle the arguments, set the priorities, and "see the big picture" so that we may spot the opportunities others may miss.

And we tweak it all again and again.

Editors aren't supposed to take over the city editor's chair, no matter how tempting. Not only is that just plain bad form, it sends a message to the staff that they cannot be trusted with the big story. And it sets that editor straight down the path to burnout.

We're going to have to do this all over again, probably not too long from now. Remember to lead the band, not play the flute.

Oh, and remember to order the pizza.



Linda Cunningham is executive editor of the Rockford (Ill.) Register Star. She speaks regularly at API on leadership topics.



Taking bold steps at ‘ground zero’ to deliver the news to shocked readers

By JOHN W. SUTTER

It was a hell of a week. On Sept. 11, 2001, at 8:40 a.m., we dropped our 5-year-old daughter off at P.S. 234 – four blocks north of the World Trade Center – to start her second day of kindergarten. We then walked two blocks over to Hudson Street where we were to drop our 4-year-old son off for his first day at the local Montessori school.

A hundred feet short of his school, we were ambushed by the horrific sound of a jet gunning its engines. My shoulders stiffened, I knew it was crashing. I looked the wrong way but my wife, Kathleen, spotted the jetliner to the east of us at about 800 feet. It was roaring and going fast. When it hit World Trade Center No.1, the north tower, Kathleen’s knees buckled and she burst out crying saying, “Oh my God,” and pointed to the ominous black hole and billowing smoke at the 70th to 80th floors of the tower.

I told Kathleen that I would return to P.S. 234 to check on our daughter and asked her to stay with our son. On the way ... oh my God, that horrible jet sound again. The second tower was hit. We were under attack. Would there be a third plane?

I met Kathleen at our home in Tribeca, six blocks north of the burning towers, and got up on the roof. The fires were eating through the upper floors, and I was so close I could see people on the 90th to 100th floors of the north tower waving black shirts out of the windows. A police helicopter hovered nearby then sped off. People kept frantically waving their black shirts. Then the jumping started. First one, then another, then three almost at the same time, then another, then another. The pace of the nightmare was picking up. When the south tower went down, we knew we had to get north.

We fled, carrying the kids, joining thousands of others fleeing up Hudson Street. Along the way another sonic boom pierced the chaos. We frantically searched the sky for another attack. I later found out it was a U.S. Air Force fighter jet. When the second tower came down, a wave panic took hold. Behind us we could see an enormous mass of clouds and smoke heading our way up Hudson Street. Everyone started running.

When we got to my newspaper’s office at Canal and Greenwich, about a third of my staff was already there, tracking events. We took three families into the building with us. Then we tried to put out a newspaper

When the mayor closed the city south of 14th Street, my employees had to cross five police checkpoints to get to our office. At first, those who had press passes had no trouble; especially effective were the press passes issued by the New York Police Department. By Thursday showing a press pass proved to be a detriment. Police were especially suspicious because the disaster site was already flooded with too many relief workers and hangers-on, and every amateur shutterbug in New York was trying to run the barricades.

Key art and production employees, however, never managed to get to work on Sept. 11 or Sept. 12. Had I

been able to get to the printer – who I couldn’t reach by phone for two days – and, of course, the bridges were closed so he would not have been able to print the paper anyway because of his own thin staffing. The kicker? Our courier, who has delivered our mechanicals to the printer for 10 years, failed to show. The reason? Three-quarters of his drivers are Muslim and feared driving around the city especially with President Bush coming to town. My editor finally bicycled the paper in the rain, eight miles to Queens, at midnight.

I’m worried about my free distribution paper, the Downtown Express, which is circulated south of Canal Street. This is the only community newspaper whose total circulation is at ground zero in this disaster. With no vehicles except emergency vehicles allowed south of Canal Street, I was not able to distribute the paper. And to whom, anyway? Ninety percent of the 60,000 residents had been evacuated and 95 percent of the businesses, and 100 percent of my advertisers, were shuttered. No distribution was possible, no population to distribute it to, no advertisers. Hell of a formula.

The delay of two days gave us the time to pull together a full “disaster” edition of The Villager. Someone asked me at one point why I was knocking my head against the wall, trying to publish in this horrendous week. He suggested that maybe I should defer publishing, as a show of respect for the victims, similar to the NFL I presume. When I think of our local fire companies that were decimated in the first wave, and the many victims still buried under the rubble, I am proud to have told their stories. I only wish I could have done it on time.

One month after the attacks, our lower Manhattan community is slowly coming back to life. Residents are returning to their homes, the “frozen zone” around the disaster site has been shrunk further, and police checkpoints are fewer. Businesses, however, are devastated. And our newspaper revenues, which depend on the small businesses, are down 75 percent.

So what have we done in the face of plummeting revenues? We’ve gone weekly from biweekly, and doubled our print run. Counterintuitive, but the right thing to help this shell-shocked lower Manhattan community deal with the aftermath of the attacks. How are we paying for this? We haven’t sorted that out yet.

But our paper has suddenly become a “must read”. The biweekly cycle is death for news in a fast moving disaster zone.

We’re reaching out for federal aid and local small business assistance. Trying to collect from our insurance companies. Trying to get legislation written out of Albany and Washington to help small businesses (including us!) get back on our feet.

I long for the peace and prosperity of my “old” headlines (e.g., “Pols debate size of new rec center”), but they’re gone, for now, replaced by a new sense of mission.

John W. Sutter is publisher of The Villager and the Downtown Express in lower Manhattan.



What newspapers are about

By SCOTT BOSLEY

There weren't enough newspapers to go around Sept. 12, 2001. The Washington Post was re-stocking at my local drug store. The last Washington Times was walking out the door. There was no New York Times and just one Wall Street Journal (I bought it). It was shortly after 8 a.m.

Like many Americans, I had been transfixed by marvelous (and advertising-free) television news coverage for hours the day and night before. Still, I wanted the focus and detail and definition only newspapers could provide.

Clearly, I was not alone. Cynics say that motivating more people to buy more newspapers is simply fueled by the desire to make money. That it is all about circulation. All about the money.

NOT!

It is in these defining moments that newspapers truly fulfill their public-service mission. It costs real money to add pages to the newspaper – in newsprint and ink, distribution, and news staff and other overtime.

Stories such as the horrific terrorist attacks of Sept. 11 drive us to act from our First Amendment roots to tell the story now and worry about the budget later. They also drive us to our creative heights. Leaders think large. Staffers are energized.

Readers have come to expect special results instantaneously – and newspapers deliver.

There are no stories save the last similar attack on this country at Pearl Harbor to clearly match these events. But through the years, newspapers have mastered the art of telling big stories, in saturation, for history.

They are the moments journalists remember with pride because they and their organizations were pressed to the limits of their capabilities, yet delivered excellence.

Whether it was riots in our cities, Kent State, the assassination or resignation of a president, Dr. King's

assassination, the fall of Challenger from the sky, the death of Elvis, the killing of John Lennon or major events in our own back yards – for me, during my time at the Akron Beacon Journal, for instance, there was Thurman Munson's fatal plane crash – newspapers have become more skilled at fulfilling the need for quick, insightful coverage.

Importantly, this is often accomplished despite huge obstacles. In Grand Forks, N.D., though its buildings were destroyed by a great flood, the newspaper delivered day after day, with help from others and with tremendous dedication from a staff burdened with heavy personal difficulties. The editions they produced were the glue holding together a community torn asunder.

On the wall in my office is the framed front page of a five-day-a-week business newspaper, The Journal of Commerce, of which I was editor on Friday, Feb. 26, 1993. At 12:15 that day, a tremendous explosion rocked our office in Building Two of the World Trade Center (yes, the first structure to fall Tuesday). The lights went out, acrid black smoke filled our hallways. All of us were among the fortunate and escaped to safety, smoke entrails still planted around our noses and mouths, about an hour later. With help from remote staff, we put out Monday's edition. And Tuesday's. And Wednesday's. A month later we moved back into our 27th-floor perch overlooking the Hudson River, the Statute of Liberty and Ellis Island.

The newspaper moved to New Jersey some months ago, and my former associates were not in WTC II when the terrorists were "successful" on the second try at knocking down the twin towers.

Beyond the chilling remembrances or our earlier horror in the day's e-mail exchanges, the story and the next day's newspapers left another indelible impression:

Journalism is not just about the money.



Scott Bosley is the executive director of the American Society of Newspaper Editors.

