

NINE on TEN

A NEWSPAPER FOR CLIENTS AND FRIENDS OF NEWS DESIGN ASSOCIATES, INC. / No. 1, 1996



Exposed
WHAT WE CAN LEARN FROM
SUPERMARKET TABLOIDS

Richard Smallbone

Not just another media publication

Welcome to the first issue of *Nine on Ten*, a tabloid for clients and friends of News Design Associates.

What's it all about? Well, its prime purpose is, as you'd expect, to show the world what a great bunch of guys we all are.

But *Nine On Ten* also gives us an opportunity to print articles that will entertain, inform, delight, offend and otherwise occupy your attention for about half an hour, two or three times a year.

One thing we hope you'll notice about our publication is a

slightly contrarian view of our industry. We don't share the opinions of the prophets of doom who take masochistic delight in proclaiming the end of the road for the printed media.

Shout as much as you like about the perilous state of the industry, but we don't agree.

Yes, newspapers are in trouble. But much of that stems from within: witness the breast-beating hypocrisy of publishers who wail about the demise of the press while slashing staffs and newsholes, simultaneously clutching at the straw of every academic's half-baked plan for a brave new journalism that will

once again become relevant to readers and, more important, extract even more cash from advertisers.

Our view of the future is relatively simple: give readers something worth reading, then they'll continue to read — and advertisers will continue to spend cash!

That means letting journalists do what they're paid to do, ignoring the temptation to take the cheaper option of filling pages with dated, irrelevant and often pointless — but always cheap — wire copy.

Good journalism is honest, it's relevant, it's energetic, it's often irreverent but, most of all, it's

fun. It incorporates the best and worst of journalistic technique and styles, from penetrating probes and exposés right down to local news and gossipy anecdotes about our favorite screen personalities.

Yes, we can learn much from *The New York Times*, but we can learn as much from the *National Enquirer*, hence our cover story which points out that the *Enquirer* and its cronies do some things better than most other newspapers. What are they? Turn to page 4 to find out.

Several people have asked how we arrived at our name? It was difficult; there are so many

publications with print-associated names that we seemed in danger of running out of clichés to appropriate. Then, while messing with the text face for this issue, I realized that the text type size — it's Utopia, set 9 on 10 — seemed an apt title. Simple!

Finally, thanks to Monotype for supplying the typefaces used in this issue. See page 7 for details of the fonts we've used.

Enjoy it. Then write, phone or e-mail your suggestions or, better still, give us a contribution for the next issue.

Tony Sutton
Editor

THOUGHTS ON DESIGN

Edwin Taylor: on editors and designers



Designer Edwin Taylor, former design director of the London *Sunday Times* and ex-managing editor of *U.S. News & World Report*, has long been acknowledged as a giant in newspaper design and is credited with starting the graphics revolution in Europe and North America.

A few of his words of wisdom:
On writers: "I've seen so many good reporters become gentlemen writers. They get complacent and lazy. You've got to say to them, 'Your job is not just to write, but to explain.' And explanation requires a language. Which one? If a photograph deals with the story's emotions,

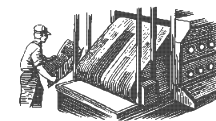
why try to write it? It's only going to diminish the picture and look silly. And you can't write about velocity, speed and distance traveled — you must show them in a graphic. We have to teach writers how to use dimensional thought."

On designers: "Put simply, the designer's job is to get readers to the first paragraph. To do that exposes one of the great blindnesses that most designers have, in that they often don't have an interest in the stories. They don't have a narrative curiosity and they don't read. They are not looking at the article and thinking of what the shape ought to be. Information has a shape to it. It's not just a design; there's a compulsion there. Does it go horizontally? Does it go down the page? How ought the elements to fit together to provide a natural, easy

flow of information from editor to reader? That's the purpose of good design. It's not interior decoration or fine art. It's communication."

On reading: "I've always believed that to hold the attention of the reader, you must have four points of editorial impact in an average edition of your newspaper. To do this, you must be able to define what items have natural projection potential. The philosophy of your newspaper should say that you need active pages in certain positions, and you must make the best of that material. All newspapers need a mechanism that allows this."

On projection: "Pertinent information strongly projected is good journalism. Pertinent information projected poorly is inadequate; it's bad journalism."



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News Design Associates is a publishing consultancy devoted to helping its customers achieve excellence in all aspects of editorial, design and production

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Monotype Ad

WRITING

A fairly sensible,
if ever-so-slightly
offensive, guide to

COACHING WRITERS

By DON GIBB

With all the recent emphasis on media takeovers and efforts to improve already-bloated bottom-lines, it's becoming hard to concentrate on dealing with the practicalities of day-to-day life in the newsroom trenches. Like talking about the craft of writing.

I'm about to rectify that with my amazing no-cost, 8-point program to pull your newsroom out of the doldrums, or at least take your mind off return on revenue, vacation schedules and irate readers. It's called *How to Coach Worth a Shit*. But, wait! A more appropriate title might be *How to Produce the Right Climate in your Newsroom for Coaching Writers*.

1: NO S***

This is not what we would call a strong coaching word — as in “When are you moving that s***?” “How much s*** have you got?” “Why are we still writing about this s***?” “This is s***.”

As a former city editor, I remember confronting the s*** problem with a copy editor, whose over-exuberant use of *THAT* word was causing trouble. Having heard the word used to describe my own copy — often legitimately — when I was a reporter, I talked about the sensitivity and vulnerability of reporters and about the need for the editor to consider his role as the guardian of the reporter as well as the reader.

“Reporters have trouble believing you care and respect their efforts and work when they constantly hear it described as s***,” I told him and braced for the counterattack.

“No problem. I'll stop saying it,” was his response.

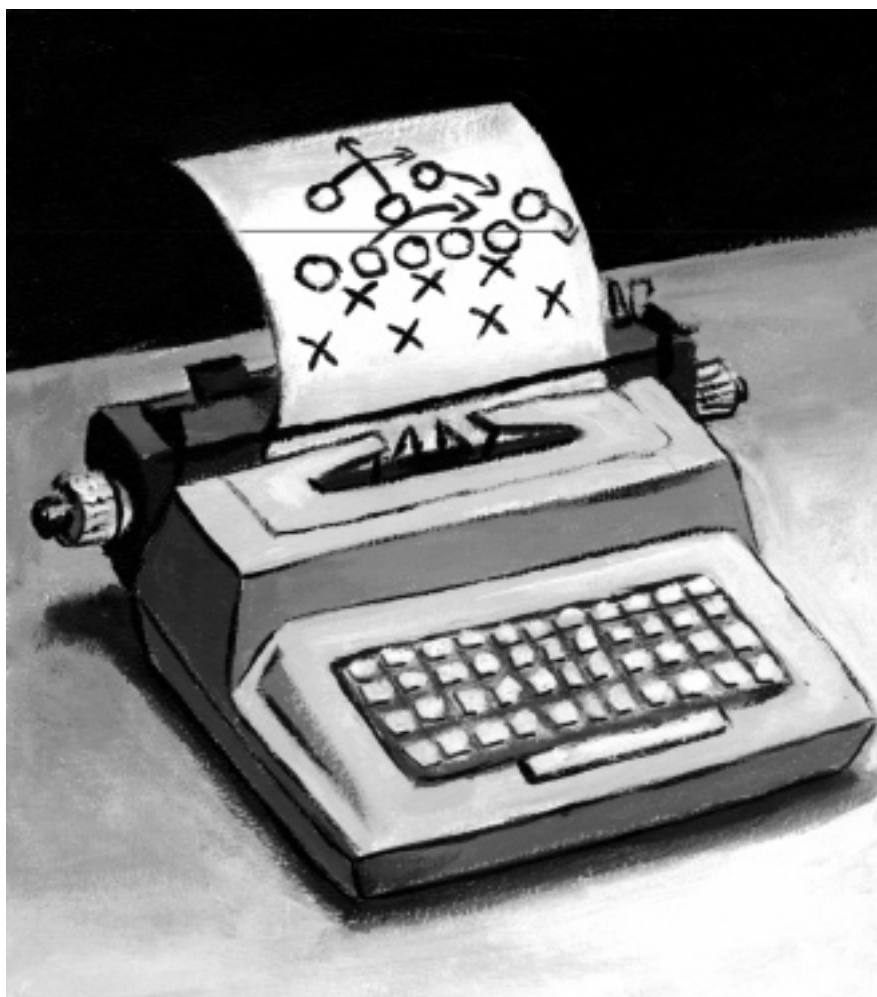
Pardon???

“You're right. I understand how it can bother reporters.”

And he did stop. Not that the conversation resulted in a healthier, friendlier atmosphere in the newsroom, but it was a small obstacle removed from the gap between writer and editor. Getting s*** out of the way made discussing other issues easier.

2: CARE

I asked editors who attended a workshop last year to talk in advance to a



Rui Ramalho

reporter in their newsroom to find out what they thought were the best and worst qualities of an editor. I was struck by how often the word “care” cropped up in their comments. “Feel and act enthusiastic about a reporter's assignment. Show you care and get excited about a story,” said one reporter.

Reporters want editors to show enthusiasm for their stories. It rubs off, sending a signal to the newsroom that editors care about what reporters are doing today. Try it; it will push reporters to do a better job.

3: THE BUTCHER FROM NANAIMO

I met Walter Cordery, of the *Nanaimo* (B.C.) *Daily Free Press* at a copy editing seminar. He said he'd been a butcher before becoming a copy editor and city editor. Some reporters wouldn't make the distinction. “Butcher” is the reporter's equivalent of the editor's “s***.” You should be aware of danger signs exhibited by shoddy editors. Telltale signs of formulaic editing are:

* **Deleting quotes.** It's a fast and dirty way to cut a story to size. It's also a quick and dirty way to dull down a story and make writing passive.

* **Chopping from the bottom.** In the days of the inverted pyramid, it was the norm. But today when we are encouraging reporters to tell stories and consider that endings are just as important as beginnings, this is sloppy editing.

* **Consistently substituting the editor's pet words or phrases** in place of the reporter's choice of words with no resulting improvement to content.

4: JC

Those are the initials of an editor who used an old Underwood to type notes to reporters when they had done a good

job. He typed on half sheets of yellow newsprint used for writing headlines — all lower case: *gibb: helluva job on the wolfe island piece. nice read.*

His notes bolstered his editing because he cared about good work and he rewarded it with such a note. Not every day, not every week. Just when the story moved him. We should take the idea of JC notes a step further by reinforcing good writing through specific comments about a story.

I once told a reporter that several of the quotes he'd chosen had done an excellent job of taking the reader into a highly emotional scene. He had made them feel part of his story.

It was a 10-second aside as I walked through the newsroom, but I found him a few minutes later re-reading his story. I guessed he'd taken the comment to heart and was seeing what it was he'd actually achieved by using those quotes.

5: WHAT TIME IS IT?

The moment reporters can set their watch by you, you're dead. How many of us have worked for this kind of editor?

Tuesday, 2:10 p.m.: *Time for the editor to walk through the newsroom ... spread goodwill and cheer to all ... boost morale ... pat a few backs ... toss out a few general, laudatory comments ... maybe use the s-word once, but not in a derogatory way ... walk back to the office (not to be seen again until precisely 2:10 p.m. the following Tuesday).*

Walk the newsroom every day. Don't create the suspicion that you're checking up on reporters, but show interest in what is happening before you hit the news budget meeting later in the day.

6: GOT A SECOND ... ASK QUESTIONS

Make it 30 seconds. That's all it takes to ask a reporter about the story he or she's working on. While this may not seem like coaching in the formal sense of the word, it is. A reporter was working on a major annexation announcement. A walk through the newsroom produced this: “How's the story shaping up, John?”

“Big stuff. The city wants to annex 100,000 acres with an assessed value of \$50 million. Most of it is prime industrial land. Not much farmland.”

“What's that mean in lost property taxes to the township?”

“Geez, I forgot to ask.”

With that, he picks up the phone and goes after a figure that is crucial to the story. The lead will include that figure instead of the less understood assessed value.

I was just asking a question. I didn't say you'd better get this, you'd better get that. Reporters don't want to feel that you have taken control of their story, but those moments before the reporter goes on assignment or before writing the story can save a lot of editing time.

An editor at the *Chicago Tribune* says he learned his craft from an exacting editor who would ask his reporters the same question on every assignment: What happened?

That question, says the editor, helped a generation of reporters clarify their thinking and sharpen their prose.

Develop your own list of questions:

- * What's the story about?
- * What's important to our readers?
- * Have you found a focus?
- * What's your best quote?
- * Who are the most interesting people you talked to?
- * Have you got your lead?
- * How do you know that?
- * What did it look like?

7: THERE ARE NO MIRACLES

I tried to be a miracle worker once by working with an older reporter whose work consistently had to be rewritten. I failed. There were little gains ... very little. To be honest, the gains weren't worth the effort that went into this restoration project.

Not everyone is receptive to coaching, but look for the little miracles. Never try to accomplish too much in one sitting. If I can help a reporter work on one or two elements — leads, quotes, transitions, tighter writing, organization, descriptive detail, use of the senses — there's a better chance he or she can grasp the intent and improve over time.

8: MAKE COACHING A PRIORITY

When I hear from ex-students who are restless to move on, they say they're not learning anything new. “No one ever tells me what I do well or could improve upon.” They think the answer is to go to another newspaper.

Let the newsroom know that you consider writing a priority. Find a good editor and make him or her a part-time coach. Or begin with a respected editor and a reporter receptive to improving his or her work. Let them work together on a couple of projects to show how effective a good reporter-editor team can be.

Coaching doesn't replace editing. Coaches build respect and trust; they discuss, encourage and listen. And taking five minutes to talk out a confusing story with a reporter can result in a clearer story and make editing easier.

Don Gibb is a lecturer at Ryerson Polytechnic University in Toronto, and the author of the booklet and video, *How To Write The Perfect Lead*. A new booklet on interviewing techniques is to be published shortly.

Reporters don't want to feel you've taken control of their story, but those moments before writing can save a lot of editing time

Cover Story

things
we can
learn
from

Supermarket Tabloids

“Making your customers feel dimwitted, uneducated or inferior is not the best way to communicate with them”

By **TONY SUTTON**

With this story I’m going to ask you to do something you wouldn’t normally do. Don’t worry, it’s not illegal; in fact millions of your neighbors do it every week, so it can’t be bad, can it? Go down to your local supermarket, buy a packet of chips and a soda. Then, as you stand in line at the check-out, buy a copy of the *National Enquirer*. And *The Star*. And another supermarket tabloid! Did I hear you say, “Aaarrggghhh!” Good. Now take them back to your office and read them.

Study them closely. Read the headlines. Read the leads. Read the captions. Read everything. Yes, even the latest episode in the dreary, never-ending “Did-OJ-kill-his-wife-and-get-away-with-it?” saga. Notice anything? Like how readable and professional these magazines are?

Here are five lessons we can learn from the supermarket tabloids:

1. GOOD WRITING AND TIGHT EDITING SELL

Keep the writing to the minimum; keep the facts to the maximum. Writing doesn’t

have to drone on and on and on and on and on to be good.

Writers and editors don’t always realize that when stories become repetitious or tedious or meaningless, readers will treat them with the respect they deserve — they’ll turn to something more interesting, the *National Enquirer*, perhaps.

Don’t try to impress readers with your education and literary ability, and never use words they can’t understand. Making your customers feel dimwitted, uneducated or inferior is not the best way to communicate with them.

Get to the point quickly, give the details simply, wrap it up with a conclusion. Then stop. Good journalism has a beginning, a middle and an end. How long should a news story be? No longer than is necessary to relate the facts the reader needs to know. Features should be longer, but don’t overstay your welcome.

Don’t bore readers with subsidiary waffle and don’t drive them to distraction with too much balance or qualification. Give them facts, facts, facts and keep commentary out of news stories. It belongs on the editorial page.

Supermarket tabs don’t operate in

monopoly markets and don’t sell by subscription. They have strong competition and rise or fall on the quality of the product they sell every week. That quality is determined as much by the standard and style of writing as by the sheer number of scandals they manage to shoehorn into their pages.

2. GOOD HEADLINES SELL

The best headlines are those that are written freestyle, without artificial restrictions of typography or space. That was one of the lessons I learned when I worked on tabloid newspapers and general interest magazines. And it applies just as much to the local community broadsheet as it does to national million-sellers — especially when you’re sweating over the wording of the main head of the day at the top of the front page. Great, eye-catching and throat-clutching headlines will never be written in two or three lines of 60pt with a character count of seven or eight units per line and a stipulation that modifiers or infinitives should be on the same line.

To be really attention-grabbing, the main front and feature page headlines should be written first, then the rest of the page assembled around it. Develop the prime focal



Rui Ramalheiro

point and everything else ought to slot neatly into place.

Don't try to tell the whole story in the headline. You can't. It's impossible. Zero in on the best information and shout it out. You may wish to qualify the headline information, but do that in a subsidiary headline, please!

3. GOOD PICTURES SELL

Insist on action, demand exclusivity. Supermarket tabloids know that readers connect first of all with the image, then the words, so they make sure photographs are unique, powerful and express strong emotions.

There's no reason why we shouldn't pursue the same goals, by demanding images that will add an extra dimension to the newspaper page.

Develop an off-beat style, especially for the front-page picture that the reader sees first. There's nothing wrong with an eight-by-three or a six-by-four photograph — but every day? That might be a recipe for neat, easy-to-plan, pages, but where's the action? Look at, and learn from, the tabs. They know how to scale and crop pictures to eliminate dead space.

Follow their example — project the best image of the day in the most meaningful way. That could mean an ultra deep double-column, a shallow six-column, or a huge cut-out. Ignore the pitiful bleats about preserving the purity of the original rectangular

image from the hand-wringing theorists in the photographic department, just produce strong images for the readers. They're the ones who buy the paper.

Almost any picture is better than the ones we saw moving across the TV screen yesterday. Encourage staff photographers, buy from local freelancers. Develop a unique style and create an anticipation that your newspaper will print memorable photographs every day. There is no better way of connecting with your readers.

4. HUMOR SELLS

We live in a vicious, violent and intimidating world, but there's still a place for fun. Well, there ought to be, and not just on the comics page, either.

As journalistic "professionals," we may find it difficult to comprehend the reality that we will get more reader reaction to a three-inch story about a two-headed hound in Honolulu than a 50-inch account of the sleep-inducing monthly gathering of an obscure branch of local government. (The fact that that statement may offend some editors proves just how out of touch they are with their customers). That's why we play up one and forget the other.

I never could understand why we'd want to take the funniest stories from the wires and put them on the staff bulletin board, but not in the newspaper. But we do. Every day.

Well, don't. Put them in the newspaper where they belong. Just like the tabs do.

5. CONTESTS SELL (AND SO DO LETTERS)

If you want to connect with your reader, give them something to write to you about. Especially if they can win something. Everyone likes to be asked for an opinion, but newspapers generally don't consider their readers qualified enough. So, for example, they rarely ask the man or woman in the street how they feel about the justice system. Instead, they ask "experts" — psychologists, psychiatrists, social workers, judges, professors. Yawn!

However, *Public Eye*, a short-lived Canadian tabloid did much better by inviting readers, through a box at the end of major stories, to *Be The Judge*, and phone in their opinions to a 1-800 number. *Public Eye* — like every other tab — also ran weekly contests in which readers could win serious cash prizes. "Ah, yes," I can hear the rumblings from 101 newsrooms, "but supermarket tabs are not like us. Their job's entertainment, ours is Serious Journalism."

Be that as it may, the standards of journalism in the tabs are higher than in many, many newspapers. If you don't agree, take another look at the quality of headline writing, the effectiveness of the leads, the appeal of the pictures and the dynamism of the design in the tabs. Then ask yourself: Does my newspaper do as well?

Tony Sutton is President of News Design Associates.

"Almost any picture is better than the one we saw moving across the TV screen yesterday"

HEADLINES

If you don't read this, we'll shoot the writer

By JEFF TRUESDELL

Orlando Weekly is a free, alternative paper — a detail that's essential to understanding how we go about our work.

Not one to hide behind the facade of journalistic objectivity, we engage in commentary, in point-of-view reporting, much more than mere recitation of fact. Simple information is not enough. We want to engage the reader in debate. If that means that we sometimes take sides, so be it; it does not mean we forego fairness or accuracy. Yet, because style and substance are equal partners on our pages, attitude counts for a lot. A newspaper without personality is just another newspaper.

The hook is the headline.

Liberated from the confines of daily journalism, we defy the truncated norm ("Credit life premiums spur suit"). Neither do we fuss with heads that tell a story, however inventively that may be done ("Headless body in

topless bar"). That lets us focus on tone.

And, while we are serious in approach, we also are serious about creating a sense of playfulness. As much as the copy, heads are used to define the fresh, free-wheeling identity that we want to flow from cover to the closing column. Yes, as a free distribution paper, it's the cover that gets the most attention. Unlike magazines, we don't have to fight to stand out from a cluttered newsstand; our paper usually is isolated in its own box or rack. But, like a magazine, we have just one shot to snag passers by.

A marriage of word and image works well. Humor works better. Some recent examples:

- For a story on the excesses of tourist-targeted dinner theatres: "The Plate Show."
- For a piece about sexual harassment in a sheriff's office: "Law and Ardor."
- For one about an art show mounted to convince lawmakers of the natural beauty that warranted safeguards for the



"Sheet Heads was rejected" because "our publisher has no humor about such things."

everglades: "Swamp and Circumstance."

● For a feature about the sleepy programming on a public television station: "Broadcast Snooze."

● For another media feature, one that examined two newspapers' contrasting campaigns to retry a death row inmate, illustrated by a photo of the electric

chair: "Current Events."

Luckily, we have a team of editors that embraces the importance of the pitch.

Far from being a game of one-upmanship, headline-writing on almost every page is for us a collaborative effort, requiring the same time and concentration that the best writers lavish on their leads.

Typically, these group discussions are full of tortured twistings, too-subtle shadings and not a few near-misses. But when one hits, the recognition is instant. Also, we'll steal from anybody. Sometimes, the heads don't work until you've read the story (a favorite example, for an inside item about a man who spilled dish detergent on women at the grocery store so he could fondle their breasts while "helping" to clean up: "Softens hands while you do the misses").

Sometimes we come up with a headline first and then assign the story just so we can use it ("Academia Nuts," about offbeat college courses was

better in concept than execution.

Sometimes we have to pull back to protect ourselves ("Unmasking the Klan," a dreadfully straightforward spin on the KKK, replaced the favored "Sheet Heads" because we know our publisher has no humor about such things).

Sometimes — rarely — we are so taken by our own cleverness that we use a head without regard to whether readers will catch on. (No example; you wouldn't get it, anyway.)

But it's not just us, and it's not just the alternative press. The great editor Gene Roberts, asked how he set out to remake the Philadelphia Enquirer, said he began with the copydesk. If you can't sell a story, even a great story, no one will see it, he said.

I agree. If only I could come up with a head for this piece...

Jeff Truesdell is editor of Orlando Weekly in Florida.

NDA Advert

READERS

Why the press hates the public

Yes, we're arrogant, self-righteous and often exploitative and uncaring. But it's only fair to say: You're not so swell, either

By JOHN TEVLIN

For some time now we've listened politely to the plaintive wails of the indignant public. We've heard the whining and snipes from all types, ranging from the unceasing moans in the dark from bankers to home-bound housewives rattling their bony fingers at the all-inclusive Fourth Estate, the menacing behemoth that is the media. We are even being placed upon the scale of public wrath — for God's sake — next to lawyers and politicians.

Now that's going too far.

Ever since James Fallows wrote his treatise on the ever-dwindling popularity of the press, my colleagues have been engaged in a highly public round of self-examination that borders on self-flagellation.

The New Yorker recently

wrote *two* pieces on the sad demise of public confidence in the media, including a hand-wringing apologia from the reporter who exposed the hypocrisy of Gary Hart's presidential candidacy by pointing out that Hart had humping anything that moved. "There is just too much cynicism," he said, "and I don't like it."

Well, "boo," as they say, "hoo." We feel for you, pal, but please take your personal confessions out to Hazleden or some other rehab clinic; we don't need your kind. Those of us in the press who worship the gods of journalism (Mencken, Liebling, Twain) have already stomached such media experiments as news-by-poll, focus-group story-telling, and the "We" journalism, originated by *USA Today* but universally accepted, that assumes consensus on every issue is a good

thing, the "healing journalism" promoted by feel-good general interest magazines and so-called "public" journalism, which in its least flattering form co-opts real reporters into dubious public-relations stunts.

We accept — even relish — your criticism; that's what we're here for: open debate. Yes, we are arrogant, self-righteous and often exploitative and uncaring. That given, it's only fair to say: Well, you're not so swell, either. Here's why:

No.1: It's satire, stupid. It has been eons since Jonathan Swift offered a modest proposal that encouraged the poor to eat their children, but you still don't get it. You can't tell a tongue-in-a-

cheek from a jaw-breaker. You have no sense of humor, and you don't know coincidence from irony. Columnist Mike Royko recently wrote a piece of brilliant satire that made fun of ignoramuses like Pat Buchanan who stereotype people based on race. Did the public rise up against Buchanan? Of course not, they picketed Royko instead.

No.2: "Why don't you cover 'good' news?" Because, gentle reader, you don't want good

news; you can't handle the truth. We are often accused of being crabby, irreverent and mean-spirited — but when we write something critical, at least your incessant whining lets us know you're still breathing. If we acquiesce and write a "good news" story, all we get are babbling letters from elderly librarians quibbling over the improper usage of grammar. Perhaps the media tendency to be critical simply reflects the human imperative to bitch.

No.3: "Something must be done." Your cat died. The planes are too loud. Your taxes are too high. So, you call us: "You have to do something," you plead. No, you do something. Like vote. We'll be there, we promise.

No.4: You call to complain about a story that you didn't read, but you heard about on talk radio or

from your neighbor, who heard about it on talk radio. Please, read the story — if you can.

No.5: "You misquoted me." No, knucklehead, I taped our interview; you just talk stupid. A popular twist on this complaint is, "You took it out of context." So, what exactly was the context for your phrase: "I hate faggots"?

John Tevlin writes for the Twin Cities Reader, a Minneapolis alternatively newsweekly.



THIS LIFE

A librarian too far

American Libraries, a monthly magazine for members of the American Library Association, has issued guidelines for freelance illustrators, including:

◆ At least half the individuals shown in pictures should be female, and stereotypes denigrating age, sex, ethnic background, physical handicaps or occupations "should be avoided."

◆ "In showing librarians at work, depict women as supervisors at least as often as men. Library support staff who are typing, filing or checking out books should include individuals of varied racial backgrounds."

◆ "Librarians should never be depicted as spinsters or 'little old ladies.' Male librarians do not ordinarily wear bowties. Exaggerated breasts and buttocks, shushing fingers and 'Silence!' signs are unacceptable in American libraries.

— *San Francisco Chronicle*

Advert

HUMOR

The tragedy of change

Chaos reigns when designers move into the newsroom



Rui Ramalheiro

By DEL STONE

As I write this ... "Oof! Excuse me, pal." ... As I write this, chaos has descended on the newsroom. Desks everywhere, stacked one atop the other. Dividers leaning against walls. PCs squatting on out-of-place file cabinets. Weird food items that have lain undiscovered and ossified behind bookshelves for years and years. ... "Yo, you! Don't take that plastic frog. That's MY plastic frog. Stole it myself from the cop reporter, five years ago." ...

The occasion is a long-overdue remodeling of the *Daily News* interior. Surprisingly, it is not being done with flame-throwers. It is being done the old-fashioned way, with grit,

determination, and Lucy In The Sky With Paint Fumes.

This is a major change for us and, despite what you've heard, journalists DO NOT thrive on change. They thrive on change as long as it's other people's change.

But when change lands on THE JOURNALIST'S DESK (especially if it is a dusty, calcified fossil of a chocolate-covered doughnut the journalist lost under his file cabinet 14 years ago) he reacts with the lightning quick reflexes of a stupefied mastadon on paint fumes: The journalist writes a "tragedy of" piece ... "the tragedy of the beer truck rollover," ... "the tragedy of change."

Hence, this column.

"Hey! HEY! DON'T throw away

that BOTTLE ROCKET! I'm going to fire it across the newsroom the day I get fired." ... The new carpet color scheme is green. Kind of a condo green, in a cross-hatched pattern, with little red accents at the interstices.

It is a vast improvement over the Pesky Septic Backup Brown carpeting of yore, which hid coffee stains but did not function so much as a carpet but a densely packed layer of mulch.

The walls ... "Yes sir, that's my stress monitor. You touch the heat-sensitive patch and compare the color with the stress chart on the left. Yes sir, those are my scorch marks on the heat-sensitive patch" ... are green, like the walls of the dolphin tank at the Gulfarium.

Only difference is, we don't

do tricks. These new walls are much better than the Inquisition Yellow of the old walls. We used that color to torture job prospects. If they broke after one day, we threw them out and told them not to come back until they were REAL journalists.

One thing I don't understand. They're PAINTING over the old wallpaper. Even over the spot that reads: OLD PUBLISHER'S BODY ENTOMBED BEHIND THIS WALL. I didn't know you could paint wallpaper. This opens whole new worlds of possibilities. Instead of scrubbing my toilet, I'll PAINT IT!

And the dishes! My HAIR!

"Hey, man, like, does anybody really know what time it is? Does anybody care? Oh, sorry, Mr. D."

... About those paint fumes: If you are a normal, civilian, work-

a-day kind of Joe, then let me tell you. Those paint fumes are so strong, we are all engaged in psycho-active journalism here, kind of Stream-of-Conscious Gazette-Times-Telegraph-Tattler journalism as we teleport to our new home on Planet Mellow.

However, if you are a member of the Occupational Safety and Health Administration, I would hasten to add that all work complies with federally approved guidelines for levels of volatile toxicity in the workplace and, and ... I am the walrus. But we will have a beautiful new building ... "leggo my Eggo, man" ... and, soon, you will have a chance to see it!

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