

The Salt Lake Tribune

STAYING ALIVE

REMAINING RELEVANT IN AN EVER-
CHANGING NEWSROOM ENVIRONMENT



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The doctor is in



In this time of great change, editors must worry about new technology, threats to resources, new and ever-changing demands from their bosses, unsettled and perhaps downright scared staff, the push to do more and more — and, usually, a push to do it with less and less.

Then there's great journalism — the reason why many editors got into the business. We need to do that, too. The need for excellence in our craft has never been greater. Many of the sessions at this conference focus on processes and ideas. This Management Doctor session is meant to be about you, the editor. How do you ensure you're on top of your game?

We've corresponded with editors throughout the country and solicited their advice. What's presented here are selections from the best responses — from editors representing small-, mid- and large-sized newspapers and others in the industry — and are meant to help you with your discussions in St. Louis. We also hope they might help you with your development, and others in the newsroom, after you return home.

Be a leader, and roll with the changes.

I have been in newspapers longer than most members of APSE and I have seen lots of changes. I tell people that I have gone from hot type to cold type to no type. Most of the changes have been production oriented. Computers, laptops, color pages all were enhancements to production.

But the changes going on now with websites and the Internet are fundamental to how we give readers news and information, the core reason most of us got into this business.

Not only can we still give information to our readers better than other media, we are no longer bound by the 24-hour cycles of the print world. Actually, it is like a throwback to early newspapers. At one time the old Philadelphia Bulletin had 13 daily editions. It would produce a new edition after every Phillies inning with an updated score. Sounds like the game-time blogging many of us are doing now.

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the best way to deal with change is to be a leader for the change. Look for opportunities. Encourage those who work for you to be enthusiastic. Don't be a negative influence. Use the atmosphere for change to your advantage. Know that the opportunity quickly passes. Someone will grab the chance — if not you then another department head or someone wanting to lead a department. If you try to explain all the reasons not to change, you will only be thought of as someone slowing down the operation — not as the wise sage.

I think there are times to resist some change. But you need to make sure you have a better way to accomplish the same goal.

I truly believe the changes going on now make our professional lives more exciting. It certainly isn't always uplifting, with cutbacks, buyouts and layoffs. But it presents us an opportunity to solve problems, to manage our resources and departments. That is what we should be most prepared to do.

— Roy Hewitt, *Cleveland Plain-Dealer*

The sports department is filled with guys who have been doing things the traditional way for years. A lot of guys just want to continue doing things the traditional way. The most important skill may be selling your ideas to the staff.

— Joe Palmquist, *Spokane Spokesman-Review*

Talk to those around you.

Talk to the editor and the managing editor and your peers about what's going on in the business, what's going on in your shop, pitching ideas that involve stories and issues beyond your department. In short, taking the initiative, don't wait to be tapped on the shoulder.

If there's a big controversy in your community and it doesn't involve sports, don't sit back and watch. Thrust yourself into the debate about news coverage at the morning meeting. What would you do? What thoughts do you have about coverage? Similarly, if other newsroom leaders have opinions about our section, and stories to offer, accept them graciously and analyze them on merits.

With the direction of coverage changing rapidly, we all need to learn from one another on how best manage two worlds, print and online. Contribute where you best can, and listen and learn from others. With the ever-increasing focus in developing content for online, I would talk to your director of the paper's online operation and be totally plugged into what is happening, what your department needs to make happen, how you can best work together.

There's no turning back in the newspaper industry. We either get better with our online operations or cease to be relevant.

— Scott Monserud, *Denver Post*

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My cousin Paulie.

My cousin Paulie from New Jersey gave me a sobering slap to the face during a recent visit when he complained about some agate we mistakenly left out of the section. "I already know who won last night," he growled. "This is all I need from you. Get it right." An irreverent comment on the newspaper biz's growing irrelevance. There's the challenge . . . combating ESPN and our own Web site for reader interest.

Staying relevant' means putting stuff in the newspaper that not only will inform people, but surprise them. Lately, we're thinking about this all of the time.

The Web, at least in a most rudimentary approach, we're getting under control. Reporters are realizing the importance of getting the news out there in an instant and updating stories throughout the day. Editors are riding herd all day and all night. So what's in tomorrow's newspaper that readers don't know? Or what more can we say about a story that was posted on the Web 16 hours before the newspaper landed on the lawn?

On a larger scale, there's the urgency to turn "mini-enterprise" on a daily basis. Again, reporting that takes a topical or talk story beyond the basics. I'm finding this to be a revitalizing task. I've always attempted to stay plugged into what's going on around the newsroom, how other departments handle breaking news, enterprise, etc. But more than ever

there's an urgency to take a multi-media approach to news.

Sports always has been an important and respected contributor in our newsroom. Editors not only are interested in 1A sports candidates, but invite us to write ourselves onto the front page as much as possible. Same situation on the web, where we're working more and more toward audio and video presentations.



Mainly, we ask a lot of questions regarding possible ways to enhance coverage of everything from breaking news to major events.

I'm not pretending to be up and running on the latest technological advances — I can't even figure out how to monitor my 12-year-old's MySpace — so my initial

task is to determine what might or might not work in the Web world.

It's crucial to keep an open mind. Not every multimedia function is applicable to the fluid and often audio/video restrictive world of sports, but at least consider ways to use technology to your advantage.

Additionally, there's the management issue of getting everyone on board and moving in the right direction.

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Resistance comes from purists of print journalism. The trick is to get those journalists to understand that ink or internet, it's still all about words that inform, intrigue and entertain.

And for cousin Paulie' sake, get the agate right.

— Nick Moschella, *Palm Beach Post*

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Don't stop learning.

Continuing education in our field is vital. Some of that comes from formal training, others from feedback obtained from peers or superiors. It can be as simple as calling someone and asking them how they approached an event or story. Or it can be requesting time to go to conferences or seminars.

When we make critical decisions, we should always review the impact on ourselves and our staff. When I lose a hand in poker, I replay it my head. Did I do something stupid? Did I make a mistake? Or did I do everything right and it just didn't work out? We should do the same with our jobs. Did we do everything possible to get the desired result? Did we drop the ball somewhere? If we can't answer that, find someone who can and ask them.

We remain vital by acquiring skills that others do not have. All of us need to learn about the future of our business. We're not just sports editors anymore. We need to be video editors, audio editors, Web site managers. We can stay relevant by excelling in those areas in addition to coming up with compelling stories for our sports sections. We need to look at our jobs 10, 15, 20 years down the road, not just five.

We remain vital by becoming better managers. We all learned how to be journalists at some point or we wouldn't have the jobs we have.

But if we can manage people and make them better — and provide guidance and leadership — we can be relevant at any job. I honestly believe it is more important to work on our ability to improve the people around us than it is to do the jobs for them. That's hard for most editors; you are doers and achievers. But learning to manage others improves the entire product; it improves you as a leader. And it makes everyone better.

How do we make time? We make sacrifices. Sometimes we need to let someone else handle the editing duties and day-to-day operations so we can focus on improving our leadership skills. Then we teach that person what he or she did right or wrong. That means stepping back from the product and being willing to take the heat from on high if it's not what you wanted.

Find out what papers are ahead of the curve on their Web sites and see what they are doing. Look at top 10 papers and try to determine how you can do what they do and do it better than they do.

That takes time and effort. Sometimes, your section won't be what you wanted because you let someone else handle it. Or you try to do everything and your personal life suffers. Those are sacrifices that we sometimes have to make to be great leaders. In the end, we'll only improve by looking at our own weaknesses and spending time on them.

— Fred Faour, *Houston Chronicle*

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Develop your staff.

I think as you work to develop staff, deal with change and manage the department you need some me to reflect. That's tough to do while you're at work, so like most folks, I tend to do that in a quiet moment at night.

My philosophy is that you play to a person's strengths and incrementally work out the weaknesses—unless that weakness is professionally fatal (constantly miss deadlines, attitude, etc.).

When we deal with change, that's a constant self-assessment. My role has changed quite a bit in the last couple years like many of us. Not only is the Web more important to our future, but I've done more for the Web.

I don't think we ever stop managing the department. I rely a lot on my assistants for daily coverage and planning and swoop in on big things. I've not done a lot of daily planning the past few years, but that may change. As I focus more on us as a sports entity, I see the Web is huge. I may need to split off a top assistant to handle the Web only, which means I'm more involved in the daily. Again, this is a change, but it gets me back into working with reporters some, should I decide to go this route.

And there are days I could leave it all to someone else and go get a job in sales. But everytime I think that way, it's time for me to work on my development. That could be going to APSE (regional and national) or getting a group in my office together to take on a new venture in sports. I think the change, while at times daunting and frustrating, forces us to reinvent ourselves.

Bottom line is, I still love being a sports editor. I don't love explaining why we can't do every story our ME wants us to do on Steelers off-field home life, but that's part of the job. I knew that years ago.

When people ask me about goals, I say this is my goal. But since I set that parameter, then it's incumbent on me to keep relevant not only about sports journalism, but about our industry. Articles, talking to folks and interaction with colleagues can do all of that.

But it's that quiet time at night where you can do the most work, I think.

— *Jerry Micco, Pittsburgh Post-Gazette*

The most important skill is keeping an open mind and willingness to adapt.

— *Glen Schwarz, San Francisco Chronicle*

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Briefly...

I subscribe to the fail fast, fail cheap theory. If an idea doesn't work, it sits in cyberspace. So what?

— *Ron Gullberg, Casper Star-Tribune*

We've got to initiate the change by understanding how to accomplish it. The most successful of us will be the ones who understand this AND act upon it.

— *Robert Zizzo, Fresno Bee*

If you're not evolving, how can the staff? If you aren't reaching out to your online experts, how can you lead the staff?

— *Mike Bass, St. Paul Pioneer-Press*

It was true 20 years ago, and it is still true today — we're all about the great idea. We now have multiple platforms to display the idea.

— *Jeff Otterbein, Hartford Courant*

It is easy to gloss over things and not think critically about them. Thinking critically about everything we do is a skill of paramount importance.

— *Jeff Gilbert, Roanoke Times*

Embrace change and try to manage it on your own terms.

— *Gary Rogo, Connecticut Post*

THE MANAGEMENT DOCTOR IS IN

As far as staying on top of the latest advances, it's all right in front of us. Every day someone else is pushing the bar a little bit higher. Whether it be on a newspaper Web site or a national one.

— *Doug Jacobs, Tampa Tribune*