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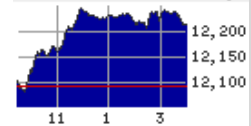
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## Code of Ethics for Gannett Newspaper Division

### GANNETT NEWSPAPER DIVISION I. PRINCIPLES OF ETHICAL CONDUCT FOR NEWSROOMS

#### WE ARE COMMITTED TO:

##### Seeking and reporting the truth in a truthful way

- n We will dedicate ourselves to reporting the news accurately, thoroughly and in context.
- n We will be honest in the way we gather, report and present news.
- n We will be persistent in the pursuit of the whole story.
- n We will keep our word.
- n We will hold factual information in opinion columns and editorials to the same standards of accuracy as news stories.
- n We will seek to gain sufficient understanding of the communities, individuals and stories we cover to provide an informed account of activities.

##### Serving the public interest

- n We will uphold First Amendment principles to serve the democratic process.
- n We will be vigilant watchdogs of government and institutions that affect the public.
- n We will provide the news and information that people need to function as effective citizens.
- n We will seek solutions as well as expose problems and wrongdoing.
- n We will provide a public forum for diverse people and views.
- n We will reflect and encourage understanding of the diverse segments of our community.
- n We will provide editorial and community leadership.
- n We will seek to promote understanding of complex issues.

##### Exercising fair play

- n We will treat people with dignity, respect and compassion.
- n We will correct errors promptly.
- n We will strive to include all sides relevant to a story and not take sides in news coverage.
- n We will explain to readers our journalistic processes.
- n We will give particular attention to fairness in relations with people unaccustomed to dealing with the press.
- n We will use unnamed sources as the sole basis for published information only as a last resort and under specific procedures that best serve the public's right to know.
- n We will be accessible to readers.

##### Maintaining independence

- n We will remain free of outside interests, investments or business relationships that may compromise the credibility of our news report.
- n We will maintain an impartial, arm's length relationship with anyone seeking to influence the news.
- n We will avoid potential conflicts of interest and eliminate inappropriate influence on content.
- n We will be free of improper obligations to news sources, newsmakers and advertisers.
- n We will differentiate advertising from news.

##### Acting with integrity

- n We will act honorably and ethically in dealing with news sources, the public and our colleagues.
- n We will obey the law.
- n We will observe common standards of decency.

- n We will take responsibility for our decisions and consider the possible consequences of our actions.
- n We will be conscientious in observing these Principles.
- n We will always try to do the right thing.

## II. PROTECTING THE PRINCIPLES

No statement of principles and procedures can envision every circumstance that may be faced in the course of covering the news. As in the United States Constitution, fundamental principles sometimes conflict. Thus, these recommended practices cannot establish standards of performance for journalists in every situation.

Careful judgment and common sense should be applied to make the decisions that best serve the public interest and result in the greatest good. In such instances, journalists should not act unilaterally. The best decisions are obtained after open-minded consultations with appropriate colleagues and superiors – augmented, when necessary, by the advice of dispassionate outside parties, such as experts, lawyers, ethicists, or others whose views in confidence may provide clarity in sorting out issues.

Here are some recommended practices to follow to protect the Principles. This list is not all-inclusive. There may be additional practices – implicit in the Principles or determined within individual newsrooms – that will further ensure credible and responsible journalism.

### Ensuring the Truth Principle

“Seeking and reporting the truth in a truthful way” includes, specifically:

- n We will not lie.
- n We will not misstate our identities or intentions.
- n We will not fabricate.
- n We will not plagiarize.
- n We will not alter photographs to mislead readers.
- n We will not intentionally slant the news.

### Using unnamed sources

The use of unnamed sources in published stories should be rare and only for important news. Whenever possible, reporters should seek to confirm news on the record. If the use of unnamed sources is required:

- n Use as sources only people who are in a position to know.
- n Corroborate information from an unnamed source through another source or sources and/or by documentary information. Rare exceptions must be approved by the editor.
- n Inform sources that reporters will disclose sources to at least one editor. Editors will be bound by the same promise of confidentiality to sources as are reporters.
- n Hold editors as well as reporters accountable when unnamed sources are used. When a significant story to be published relies on a source who will not be named, it is the responsibility of the senior news executive to confirm the identity of the source and to review the information provided. This may require the editor to meet the source.
- n Make clear to the reporters and to sources that agreements of confidentiality are between the newspaper and the sources, not just between the reporter and the sources. The newspaper will honor its agreements with sources. Reporters should make every effort to clear such confidentiality agreements with the editors first. Promises of confidentiality made by reporters to sources will not be overridden by the editors; however, editors may choose not to use the material obtained in this fashion.
- n Do not allow unnamed sources to take cheap shots in stories. It is unfair and unprofessional.
- n Expect reporters and editors to seek to understand the motivations of a source and take those into account in evaluating the fairness and truthfulness of the information provided.

n Make clear to sources the level of confidentiality agreed to. This does not mean each option must be discussed with the source, but each party should understand the agreement. Among the options are:

- a) The newspaper will not name them in the article;
- b) The newspaper will not name them unless a court compels the newspaper to do so;
- c) The newspaper will not name them under any circumstances.

All sources should be informed that the newspaper will not honor confidentiality if the sources have lied or misled the newspaper.

n Make sure both sides understand what is being agreed to. For example:

- a) Statements may be quoted directly or indirectly and will be attributed to the source. This is sometimes referred to as "on the record."
- b) The information may be used in the story but not attributed to the source. This is sometimes referred to as "not for attribution" or "for background."
- c) The information will not be used in the story unless obtained elsewhere and attributed to someone else. This is sometimes referred to as "off the record."

n Describe an unnamed source's identity as fully as possible (without revealing that identity) to help readers evaluate the credibility of what the source has said or provided.

n Do not make promises you do not intend to fulfill or may not be able to fulfill.

n Do not threaten sources.

### **Handling the wires**

These Principles are intended to provide front-line guidance for locally generated material. Wire-service material already has been edited professionally. Gannett News Service observes these same Principles. The Associated Press has its own standards for the use of unnamed sources. Other wire-service standards may be lower. Additional scrutiny often is required, and further editing is encouraged. Ultimately, an editor must make a sound judgment about how to reconcile conflicts between wire-service and local-newsroom practices. Whenever possible, these Principles should prevail.

### **Being fair**

Because of timeliness or unavailability, it is not always possible to include a response from the subject of an accusation in a news story. Nevertheless:

- n We should make a good-faith effort to seek appropriate comment from the person (or organization) before publication.
- n When that is not feasible, we should be receptive to requests for a response or try to seek a response for a follow-up story.
- n Letters to the editor also may provide an appropriate means for reply.

Some public records will identify persons accused of wrongdoing. Publication of denials is not necessary in such circumstances.

### **Being independent**

"Maintaining independence" helps establish the impartiality of news coverage. To clarify two points:

- n News staff members are encouraged to be involved in worthwhile community activities, so long as this does not compromise the credibility of news coverage.

- n When unavoidable personal or business interests could compromise the newspaper's credibility, such potential conflicts must be disclosed to one's superior and, if relevant, to readers.

#### **Conducting investigative reporting**

Aggressive, hard-hitting reporting is honorable and often courageous in fulfilling the press' First Amendment responsibilities, and it is encouraged. Investigative reporting by its nature raises issues not ordinarily faced in routine reporting. Here are some suggested procedures to follow when undertaking investigative reporting:

- n Involve more than one editor at the early stages and in the editing of the stories.
- n Question continually the premise of the stories and revise accordingly.
- n Follow the practices outlined in the use of sources.
- n Document the information in stories to the satisfaction of the senior editor.
- n Have a "fresh read" by an editor who has not seen the material as you near publication. Encourage the editor to read it skeptically, then listen carefully to and heed questions raised about clarity, accuracy and relevance.
- n Make certain that care, accuracy and fairness are exercised in headlines, photographs, presentation and overall tone.
- n Evaluate legal and ethical issues fully, involving appropriate colleagues, superiors, lawyers or dispassionate outside parties in the editorial process. (For example, it may be helpful to have a technical story reviewed by a scientist for accuracy, or have financial descriptions assessed by an accountant, or consult an ethicist or respected outside editor on an ethical issue.)
- n Be careful about trading information with sources or authorities, particularly if it could lead to an impression that you are working in concert against an individual or entity.

#### **Editing skeptically**

Editors are the gatekeepers who determine what will be published and what will not be. Their responsibility is to question and scrutinize, even when it is uncomfortable to do so. Here are some suggested practices that editors can follow:

- n Take special care to understand the facts and context of the story.
- n Guard against assumptions and preconceived notions – including their own.
- n Ensure time and resources for sound editing. Nothing should be printed that has not been reviewed by someone else. When feasible, at least two editors should see stories before publication. Complex or controversial stories may require even more careful scrutiny.
- n Consider involving an in-house skeptic on major stories – a contrarian who can play the role of devil's advocate.
- n Challenge conventional wisdom.
- n Heed their "gut instinct." Don't publish a story if it doesn't feel right. Check it further.
- n Consider what may be missing from the story.
- n Consider how others – especially antagonists or skeptical readers – may view the story. What questions would they ask? What parts would they think are unfair? Will they believe it?
- n Be especially careful of stories that portray individuals purely as villains or heroes.

- n Beware of stories that reach conclusions based on speculation or a pattern of facts.
- n Protect against being manipulated by advocates and special interests.
- n Consider these questions: "How do you know? How can you be sure? Where is the evidence? Who is the source? How does he or she know? What is the supporting documentation?"
- n Watch carefully for red flags that give reason to be skeptical of news-gathering or editing conduct.
- n Don't be stampeded by deadlines, unrealistic competitive concerns or peer pressure.

### **Ensuring accuracy**

Dedication to the truth means accuracy itself is an ethical issue. Each news person has the responsibility to strive for accuracy at each step of the process.

- n Be aware that information attributed to a source may not be factually correct.
- n Be sure the person quoted is in a position to know.
- n Be especially careful with technical terms, statistics, mathematical computations, crowd estimates and poll results.
- n Consider going over all or portions of an especially complicated story with primary sources or with outside experts. However, do not surrender editorial control.
- n Don't make assumptions. Don't guess at facts or spellings. Asking the person next to you is not "verification" – he or she could be wrong too.
- n Improve note taking. Consider backing up your notes with a tape recorder when ethically and legally appropriate.
- n Be wary of newspaper library clippings, which may contain uncorrected errors.
- n Develop checklists of troublesome or frequently used names, streets, titles, etc.
- n Understand the community and subject matter. Develop expertise in areas of specialized reporting.
- n Reread stories carefully after writing, watching especially for errors of context and balance as well as for spelling and other basic mistakes.
- n Use care in writing headlines. Do not stretch beyond the facts of the story.
- n Follow a simple rule on the copy desk to double-check the accuracy of headlines: "Find the headline in the story." (For example, if the headline says, "Three die in crash," go to the story and count the dead and be certain they died in the crash.)
- n Consider using "accuracy checks" as an affirmative way to search out errors and monitor accuracy. (Accuracy checks are a process by which published stories are sent to sources or experts asking for comment on accuracy, fairness or other aspects.)

### **Correcting errors**

When errors occur, the newspaper has an ethical obligation to correct the record and minimize harm.

- n Errors should be corrected promptly. But first, a determination must be made that the fact indeed was in error and that the correction itself is fully accurate.
- n Errors should be corrected with sufficient prominence that readers who saw the original error

are likely to see the correction. This is a matter of the editor's judgment.

- n Although it is wise to avoid repeating the error in the correction, the correction should have sufficient context that readers will understand exactly what is being corrected.
- n Errors of nuance, context or tone may require clarifications, editor's notes, editor's columns or letters to the editor.
- n When the newspaper disagrees with a news subject about whether a story contained an error, editors should consider offering the aggrieved party an opportunity to express his or her view in a letter to the editor.
- n Corrections should be reviewed before publication by a senior editor who was not directly involved in the error. The editor should determine if special handling or outside counsel are required.
- n Errors should be corrected whether or not they are called to the attention of the newspaper by someone outside the newsroom.
- n Factual errors should be corrected in most cases even if the subject of the error does not want it to be corrected. The rationale for this is rooted in the Truth Principle. It is the newspaper's duty to provide accurate information to readers. An exception may be made – at the behest of the subject – when the correction of a relatively minor mistake would result in public ridicule or greater harm than the original error.
- n Newsroom staffers should be receptive to complaints about inaccuracies and follow up on them.
- n Newsroom staffers have a responsibility to alert the appropriate editor if they become aware of a possible error in the newspaper.

### **III. REINFORCING THE PRINCIPLES**

#### **Communicating standards**

Editors have a responsibility to communicate these Principles to newsroom staff members and to the public. They should:

- n Ensure that sound hiring practices are followed to build a staff of ethical and responsible journalists. Such practices include making reference checks and conducting sufficient interviewing and testing to draw reasonable conclusions about the individual's personal standards.
- n Provide prospective hires with a copy of these Principles and make acceptance of them a condition of employment.
- n Conduct staff training at least annually in the Principles of Ethical Conduct.
- n Require staff members at the time of hire and each year thereafter to sign a statement acknowledging that they have read the Principles of Ethical Conduct and will raise any questions about them with their editors.
- n Communicate these Principles to the public periodically.

#### **Being accountable**

Because these Principles embody the highest standards of professional conduct, the Gannett Newspaper Division is committed to their adherence. They have been put in writing specifically so that members of every Gannett Newspaper Division newsroom know what the Division stands for and what is expected of them. The public will know, too.

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