

IN THE BEGINNING. . .

If communication in the newsroom is a problem -- and most of you say it's a whopper -- then let this report serve as Phase One of a determined effort to correct it.

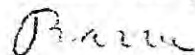
The following pages of criticisms and suggestions were not written by me. They came from you. I only organized them into a workable format, which I admit is somewhat long and sometimes repetitious. But this report represents a sincere attempt to share with you the thoughts of your colleagues so that we might work together to build a better newsroom and, in turn, to make a good newspaper a great newspaper.

The vast majority of your "You Be the Managing Editor" memos were excellent. I appreciated your frankness and carefully thought out suggestions for improvement. The enthusiasm that many of you expressed was inspiring. And statements like the following make me proud to be your managing editor:

"Whatever complaints, suggestions for change, major or minor criticism of policy or procedure, or just personal gripes that you get in these memos should not cloud the fact that the personnel in the newsroom truly enjoy working here. Please keep in mind that each of us wants very much, equally as much as any management person, to be a part of the best damn newspaper anywhere. We care about this newspaper. Please believe that."

I plan now to hold a rap session with each of you. Following these, I will formulate a program that I think will work because of what I have learned from you. Then I will sit down with the publisher.

Thanks for your support,



Barrie Hartman

SOME GENERAL CRITICISMS

Somehow the Register-Guard seems to have lost a little of the excitement it contained four or five years ago. Good local stories and good local pictures seem to have become more of a rarity. We seem satisfied too often with just getting the paper out rather than making the reader look forward to reading it.

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My primary concern is how inefficiency of the newsroom operation prevents me from doing my job. I believe the inefficiency is due to our failure to ever get ahead of our problems so we can see them and try to resolve them. More than once I've been told, for example, not to leave the office in the mornings, but that may be when it would have been well for me to be out on my beat.

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I sometimes get the impression that some people don't really give a damn about what reporters think. And this is wrong. Reporters are professionals, too, and they have a stake in what's going on. I think we would have a much happier ship if there were more two-way communications.

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Our writing quality is spotty, our photos are weak, we have no staff artist, we know little about page design, and our managing editor, city editor, news editor are subject to so much pressure that the paper's quality is affected and their health is jeopardized. Furthermore, we too often postpone dealing with problems until the last minute -- a habit I fear we may be repeating in regard to the design for our offset edition.

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Regarding the women's department: Women comprise approximately 52 per cent of the population and yet our women's department operates with less staff, less space, fewer news assignments, fewer travel expenditures for news, and more headaches than any other department. The department tends to be looked upon as a public service agency with an emphasis on doing benefits, weddings, engagements and golden weddings.

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If the women's department is to function as a women's NEWS department

instead of a glorified bulletin board and spot for Dear Abby, it is essential that it has more staff and/or be permitted to work overtime under Belo contracts.

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Let's begin putting less emphasis on coverage of meetings. Sure, let's cover the big ones and cover them well. But let's quit boring the public to death with overwritten accounts of dull meetings. Too many reporters have become lazy or frustrated, or both, defining meeting coverage as the main thing they do. I maintain that covering a meeting is seldom the best way to cover a beat, but it's always the easiest way. Just leafing through the local news in the R-G on certain days, it too often appears that life in the Emerald Empire is little more than an endless string of public meetings.

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Perhaps we are overly concerned with public agencies, at the expense of missing many really significant trends and developments which do not spring from "official sources." Officialdom is really a very small segment of the population. Can we justify 97 per cent of our time covering three per cent of the people?

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Our emphasis on meeting coverage practically guarantees dullness. And when we do cover a meeting, if nothing worth reporting occurs, there is no reason to have a story.

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Let's get off this kick of writing for the people who were at the meetings and write for the people who weren't there.

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We are truly meeting-ed to death, particularly in the areas covered by Paseman, Sellers and Kenyon. These guys are talented writers with intellect and their talent is being partially wasted. Would it be more useful to the R-G reader to have Paseman do more in-depth stuff on higher education, more features, more profiles, more seeking of "why" than simply to spend so much time reporting on faculty meetings or board meetings or student meetings?

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We are almost totally out of contact with developments in the rural

area. There are major new population trends, with both Oregonians and Californians moving in droves from the cities to the rural region, producing clashes in values, economics, life styles. For the first time ever we see rural school boards and city councils with a substantial portion of their memberships composed of citizens who have lived less than 10 years in the area. Old institutions like the Grange are dying unnoticed and uninterpreted. Farmers with eighth grade educations cling to old, simple values, while their sons and daughters pop pills behind the barn and yearn for the day when they can flee to the city. Small towns feel the pressure of big money as developers from the Eugene-Springfield area head into the hinterlands looking for easy, unrestrictive building opportunities. To date, Doug Bates' self-generated McKenzie River property values story is all we have done to even scratch the surface of these developments. And we tell ourselves that we're doing our job for the Emerald Empire by dutifully hitting the usual list of meetings.

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We all realize that the recent decline in morale and the causes of that decline are not the fault of any one person but the result of a combination of factors involving many people. Stated in a most general way, these factors are a lack of good or even adequate leadership, organization, planning, direction and communication.

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There is no clear avenue for expression of gripes or suggestions. One reason people in the newsroom have been building up resentment is that they have had no way to communicate their negative feelings to anyone higher up. It's difficult to get to the city editors because they are so busy.

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We need leadership from the city editor's chair, and I can't stress that point enough.

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In my estimation, no reporter is doing what he is capable of doing for a variety of reasons. But the most important is that there has been a lack of solid management direction based on innovative planning. Either no one in management cares about the news operation or no one knows what to do about it.

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Reporters think the city desk is less than competent, lacks basic organization and efficiency, is arbitrary and inconsistent in its news judgments

and doesn't plan more than five minutes ahead. Further, city desk policies that do exist are based on outdated values and concepts that no longer are valid if this newspaper is to be progressive.

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We seldom get any positive, constructive criticism of our stories. Hell, I like to think I'm still learning.

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For the scope of the job we're attempting to do, our city desk is spread too thin. Two men aren't enough. The city editor has too damned little time to think about all the problems that reporters bring to him, and it is not surprising that many of those decisions will be put off until adequate consideration can be given. Neither is it surprising that the reporter who came seeking a decision and goes away emptyhanded may be a bit bent out of shape. Getting that decision might be the most important thing facing him at the moment, but he perhaps forgets that the city desk may have a dozen things pending that are more important.

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Many times reporters have made inquiries or suggestions to the city desk, never to hear of them again. It is a common courtesy, at the very least, for some follow-up to be made and some response given.

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Staff meetings as they are now conducted are worthless. They turn out to be either a one-way vehicle for the city desk to justify actions already taken or an opportunity for confrontation. An informal exchange of ideas is what reporters want, but the city desk is resisting this.

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There is a lack of communication and a lack of enthusiasm in the newsroom. It's my hope we will continue to have staff meetings with the city desk. I don't believe we need agendas. I believe we need to talk.

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Regional coordination of stories involving a single issue that affects many communities is poor. Such teamwork only occurs when a reporter broaches a topic, argues successfully for it and agrees to take full responsibility for coordinating it. And because staff morale has reached the point where reporters seldom communicate with each other, few of the broad, in-depth

pieces get done at all.

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Reporters are many times not given as much notice on assignments as they could be given and it seems that not much thought is put into what assignment goes to whom.

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There is not enough time to work on feature or special projects. The city desk should be encouraging reporters' initiative in this area but, instead, almost seems to discourage it by not allowing them enough time.

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Most of us have been on our beats too long. Our perspectives have become limited. We are all less interesting because of it -- and our jobs aren't fun. And have the beats make more sense.

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Beat reporters need more freedom and flexibility to develop their stories. They can't do this with constant interruptions for obits, petty re-writes, last-minute assignments, cutlines and dictates.

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We need to re-evaluate our beats and re-evaluate our coverage. Government, even at the local level, is getting more complex every day, but we insist on continuing to treat it as if there was little more than meetings and day-to-day routine activity. Because of the increase in size of government, most reporters don't have the time to cover all of that routine fully and still examine their beats to provide the deeper meanings that I think readers need.

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Regarding the debate over whether we are a newspaper of record or a newspaper of interest, my position is that we haven't said "no" enough. It's hurt us, both in terms of staff morale and in terms of the quality of the paper. In the past, it has been suggested that we field an ad hoc review board consisting of employees and editors to review our coverage. So far the suggestion has not been taken seriously.

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Reporters spend too much time on non-productive tasks. Examples: Collecting and typing court records, being CQ and making check calls, typing dictates over the phone from reporters out of town, taking meeting notices and news input over the phone when the information could be written out and mailed by the source.

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On one particular bad morning last year, I kept track of what I did for four hours. It included one obit that took two phone calls, one precede that took three phone calls, two re-writes that took four calls, three calls on a nothing story I did the day before, a phone call to check on a possible meeting in Salem, and picking up five copies of that day's Emerald. That's not only demoralizing, it's wasteful. For \$309 a week, the R-G deserves better of me.

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Why can't part-timers be allocated to do obits, weather stats and other garbage detail? If obits are as important as we are told, then assign a part-timer full time to do them -- or some general assignment reporter. It is time to get those things off the backs of the beat reporters. Obit writers don't win the Pulitzer Prize.

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Just because another medium carries a story is no absolute reason we should. The "knee jerk" to radio and TV is past for newspapers. We can't beat them in time, so let's beat them in substance. But let's make that decision on the basis of our own news judgment, not the judgment of some rip-and-read disc jockey on a radio or TV station.

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Reporters do not have enough say on where and how their stories are played. I can't count the times I've turned in a feature story I had really worked hard on and cared about only to open the paper Sunday morning and find the story on Page 18F wrapped around a huge ad with the picture or pictures dropped down to nothing -- when I had expected (or hoped for) an attractive layout on a section page. If my Sunday features are getting this treatment because the stories are written poorly, it would be nice if I could have a stab at re-writing them or at least be told what I did wrong so I could improve the next time.

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An irritant to the staff is check calls at noon. I don't believe the police tell us if something happens; often they don't even check the log. If we think

this is important, then send the police reporter back around 11 a.m. For what we get out of it, it's not worth it.

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The new rule that a reporter must get authorization from the city desk to make a long-distance call out-of-state is ridiculous. Not only is it difficult to find a city editor who isn't busy, but it is downright demeaning.

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Regarding contests and prizes, our contest-entering program consists of asking the reporters at the end of the year what they did that was especially good over the past 12 months. When our approach is that casual, and when no editor is interested enough in what his reporters do to keep a file of exceptional efforts, I'm not interested in participating.

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Neither the Register-Guard in general nor the news operation in particular has taken any action to integrate the work forces or to reduce the possibility of discrimination by instituting an "affirmative action" program. In the case of women, although female employees in the newsroom are getting "equal pay for equal work," they have never gotten equal work. For instance, there has never been a female beat reporter. Another way we discriminate against women is by segregating "their news" from the rest of the paper. In doing this, we are saying that women are a different class of people with interests and abilities different from those of men. The women's department should be eliminated and replaced with a, say, "Lifestyle" section.

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There is no justification for hiding news behind the classified ads. This space should be reserved for vitals, obits and court records.

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Our so-called investigative reporter is a farce. Our first responsibility is to investigate what's happening in Eugene and our immediate circulation area before we spend time and money on stories that have no local impact and don't meet the same journalistic standards as other news stories. This area is a source for considerable staff resentment that should be acknowledged by management if it is to be solved.

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The Sunday paper has become a collector of dull precede stories and overly long accounts of routine events. There has not been enough long-range planning going into what should be contained in a particular Sunday issue. There should be two weeks lead time on many features instead of writing them on a Friday for the next Sunday's edition.

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Photography is one of our glaring weak points. Frankly, two or three smaller offset papers in the state with one-photographer staffs beat us regularly in terms of quality, quantity, creativity and just about any other yardstick you measure by. The paper badly needs a photo/art editor type person, someone who can direct the staff by example, if necessary.

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We need more artwork and better pictures, both local and wire. Picture editing is almost nonexistent. It makes little sense to use a picture of some kid in Michigan doing something unnewsworthy just to fill space. If it's cute, why can't we take a picture of a local kid doing the same thing? Too often wire pictures are used only to fill space and get a page down early. With tight papers, this is stupid. Our makeup too often reflects only a desire to get a page done quickly. Every page should get the same treatment that section pages and feature pages get.

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Photographers are treated as peons of the editorial department, whether it be equipment, working hours, opinion, or value to management. Suggestion for improvement: Equality.

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Reporters should not be used as photographers. Reporters who take their own pictures, while on assignments, often do nothing more than bring back record pictures.

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Some of the assignments issued photographers don't have enough information to let the photographers know what is wanted. And some of the suggestions simply do not lend themselves to a good picture.

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Business Beat is a poor excuse for a business page four times a week.

Packaging news this way is convenient and easy for the copy desk. But I don't think that should be our criterion for news presentation. Every business story should be separate. If it can't stand alone, it isn't worth the space. Much of the Business Beat material, even after screening, is still marginal news and free advertising.

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We're not covering police and court news as we should in a metropolitan area of this size. Instead, we still seem to be living in the small community where everyone knows everyone else and wants to know who's in trouble. We can improve our coverage by placing emphasis on the more significant things that are happening in the courts and in criminal law, while still not ignoring the day-to-day prosecution of criminal cases.

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The news librarian is too often spending valuable time on non-productive activities. This includes catering to every student that walks in and needs help researching a school project. The news library should be for the news staff; it isn't a public library.

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Disa 'n Data is hardly a major concern to you or to the reporters, but it is an irritant, especially since it is so amateurish. If a major newspaper is going to have a house organ, then it should be substantive.

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SOME SUGGESTIONS, OBSERVATIONS, COMMENTS

Instead of considering the Pulitzer Prize as a goal for the future, let's make it a goal for the present. I volunteer to serve on a two-man committee to research the prize and find out how the Hungry Horse News won it and how the Register-Guard can win it.

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Some things disturb me at the Register-Guard, but let me mention a few that give me cheer. Our main attributes are honesty, fairness, accuracy, thoroughness of coverage, the ability to generate a constant flow of feature ideas, and, above all, a publisher who is committed more to good journalism than to financial gain.

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I find the prospect of automation of our news operation exciting, and I greatly appreciate and respect Ted and Bunk's desire and willingness to keep this paper growing and up to date. That's one of the major reasons I'm still here.

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Speaking for myself and almost every other reporter, it's safe to say there's a genuine interest in the Register-Guard product; we all are proud to work here, want to be proud of the paper, and are willing to spend the time it takes to help the ERG become the proud paper it was as recently as four or five years ago.

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I think you were on the right track when you said the other day that it should be fun to work here. When we all operate with that attitude, we can't help but be a winning team.

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Our aggressiveness is what has helped make the Register-Guard the best paper in the Northwest. Now if we become obsessed with skimping and saving nickels and dimes, I wonder whether such aggressiveness can survive. The prevalent attitude used to be: "If it's a good story, go get it!" Now the first reaction seems to be: "How much will it cost?" Somehow -- by hook or crook, magic or the power of prayer -- you must see that this spirit of wanting to be good, of wanting to be the best, of wanting to put out the best damned

newspaper in the Pacific Northwest, is not sacrificed on the altar of Al Gemmell's balance sheets.

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There should be a general effort to spruce up the writing -- to make stories shorter and more sprightly.

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In order to improve general writing quality, a panel made up of Doug Bates, Don Bishoff and Dave Emery could be assigned responsibility to review stories and discuss ways of improving them with reporters.

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Select the two best writers from the reporting staff to serve as rewrite men in order to improve stories.

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For poor writing, revive the hallowed newsroom slogan: "Keep it short!" and impress it upon the reporters. Use the space you save to display pictures better or to run additional stories.

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Some stories need to be long. But the attitude of the city desk and the news desk is that anything over three pages is unacceptable. This mentality isn't realistic. The criteria should be its news value and quality rather than length.

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One of the common arguments we get against longer stories is that we'll lose the reader's interest. That's predicated on the old theory that every story has to be written to the comprehension level of the "logger from Veneta." I don't think that's valid now, if it ever was. People who want to know a little bit about everything can get it from the broadcast media. What they generally can't get from broadcast is background, interpretation, analysis -- what does it all mean? I think the future of newspapers is in doing what they do best: telling the "how" and "why" behind the "who, what, where." It's absurd to assume that every reader may read every story. And we must write so as to not be misunderstood.

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There should be more interpretive articles done by reporters, complete with mugs of the writer. We have reporters who know as much about a subject as their news sources. And a column or a thinkpiece -- something other than a hard news story -- would add a desirable dimension to our coverage.

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Let reporters use their expertise in whatever areas they cover by letting them write more analyses, more interpretation, maybe some columns, opinion, background, etc. To do that we need more time, and to get that, we're going to have to accept the idea of covering less in the way of "hard news."

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Perhaps there are some marginal meetings that don't deserve in-person coverage, but I think it is important for us to maintain our tradition of strong public affairs coverage and stick through these meetings to the end.

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Somehow we must strike a balance between routine vs. in-depth coverage. We are dealing with too much routine crap. But to try to get rid of some of it may produce bigger headaches than continuing the status quo.

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I think we should still stick to our basic concept of as complete a coverage of public meetings as possible. If we don't tell the public what decisions are being made -- and how -- on public issues, nobody will.

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We need to take a good, hard look at the kinds of meetings we cover and the stories we do for no particular reason except that we've always done them in the past (such as military wrap, new officers of every local group, the weekly progress reports on the United Way drive, and obits on anyone over 90, anyone who's ever lived here and anyone whose family wants one).

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We need to evaluate what events or situations we now report. We need to be more selective about what we cover so more time can be devoted to important news events. For example, Demo Forum and Rubicon don't need to be covered every week. It should depend on the program. There is no need to cover every press conference. There seems to be too much emphasis on covering something "because radio and TV will have it" rather than doing our own

thing. We need to spend more time on fewer things in order to produce a quality product that will be read because it has substance.

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We do too many precedes and obits and should wrap the former into a "notice" column and get more selective on the latter.

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We've improved about cutting down on coverage of service clubs. But let's not cover these yo-yos out of habit.

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I believe people are interested in seeing -- and not only on Sunday -- what we call features. That doesn't mean we shouldn't cover meetings; but I don't think it's necessary to give every dull fact.

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We must get more life into the paper. We need more people features, more off-beat stuff. Too many of our stories are too long. The city desk lives in fear of missing something so all meetings are assigned. We reporters are afraid we'll be called to task for missing something at the meeting so we throw everything that happened into the story. We end up with gluts of copy that doesn't get in anyway, or gets held. Let's take a few risks on missing things, tighten up our stories, skip some of the routine.

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There just aren't enough entertaining or educational stories in the paper. I have long felt that profiles of interesting people should be carried regularly, not only on Sundays but also during the week.

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We need to get back on the "people story" track. And why not have a regular local column that would be strong on people?

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In the area of general government news, we should dissolve coverage boundaries and take more of an area-wide approach. Let's forget about covering Eugene, Springfield and Lane County and start thinking about covering transportation, land use and human development.

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Reporters, while maintaining their existing beat or bureau jobs, should be organized into issue-oriented news-gathering teams. We need to stop fighting among ourselves. When Lynch, Kucera and Frake are the best three reporters to team and produce consumer reports, what are they doing in three different departments, under three different editors? The reporter team system would force us to look at the news in terms of issues, rather than in terms of beats that we have artificially created for convenience. Give us a single city-county desk and let all the news compete run-of-the-paper.

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I would like to see us do more team reporting. Form a news task force with one man in charge, work on an in-depth subject, and be responsible for a section or series.

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You might consider returning to the policy we once had of rotating beats every 18 months.

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Reporters' beats should be juggled. Two years is long enough for any reporter on a beat he isn't enthusiastic about. I believe there is a need to examine the beats we have and to determine whether any trimming, adding or consolidating is warranted.

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The ME ought to take a serious look at the assignment of beats every so often -- say once a year.

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Some reporters want beat changes, others don't. Without being persuaded otherwise, I'd oppose arbitrary and too-frequent switches in assignment.

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Up-to-date guidelines need to be established so news coverage won't be fragmented and inconsistent. There is a different standard for news handled by city reporters, county reporters and women's department. The petty bitterness between these three departments is indicative of the problem. Nothing written by the women's department or printed on their pages is expected to be "hard news." Frequently there are county stories given big display that wouldn't merit five inches if written by a city reporter. We need to unify the news

coverage with a combined news operation, except for sports. City, county and women's reporters should work for the same bosses and their material should compete for the same news space and be edited by the same copy desk.

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The R-G should renew its commitment to serving rural readers, tangibly expressed in space allotment, news display and the application of your executive worrying talents to the question of how we might better meet that commitment.

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It would be extremely valuable for the managing editor to spend a day with one or all of the bureau reporters and learn how much our thousands of rural readers depend on this newspaper in their daily lives. You could meet dozens of city officials who frankly admit that they do not consider their constituencies notified of a local development until it has appeared in the Register-Guard, regardless of what the local weekly had done on the subject. By making such visits you might also learn something of the work load facing county reporters. Although the one-night-meeting-a-week rule generally prevails for city reporters, bureau reporters regularly work three and even four nights a week. The job doesn't go away on free evenings or weekends either. Our rural readers are well aware who their local R-G reporters are and where they live. They call often with questions, complaints and tips. Calls also come from the Eugene R-G office in order to get a jump on a breaking weekend story. In short, the country reporter, like the country doctor, is on call 24 hours a day. The newspaper gets a lot for its money.

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We must define the role of the county news staff as the Register-Guard continues to grow. We should define this goal as the intensive coverage of local public affairs news in the Emerald Empire outside of metropolitan Eugene-Springfield. And to adequately meet this goal, we must do the following:

- * Immediately hire another general assignment reporter and perhaps two part-timers to work on the county desk in Eugene.
- * Recognize the limitations of having only one reporter at the coast. Either hire a second reporter and mount a circulation drive in Reedsport or acknowledge that the Reedsport area can't be covered properly with only one reporter and focus attention on the Lane County area only.
- * Buy 35 millimeter camera equipment, including wide-angle

and telephoto lenses, for each bureau reporter.

- * Convert the present teletype to a speedier system as soon as possible.

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We need a clear definition of the county department's news goals. The news and circulation goals of the paper have gotten mixed in a tail-wag-dog sort of situation. We've been forced to try to cover the areas where we sell papers rather than selling papers only in the areas where we can provide effective news service.

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Establish a new feature section to include sociological, family-living stories, foods, comics, TV, theater, reviews, horoscope, Abby, Calendar, and maybe a columnist or two. I would abolish the women's department and incorporate its most worthwhile parts into this section.

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Make bride pictures a uniform size -- preferably one-column. This would eliminate one of our most discriminating practices.

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We should get rid of women's page recipes.

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I'd like to see a reorganization of the newsroom. It would involve consolidation of all reporters from the city, county, and women's departments into a single news department. All reporters would be treated on an equal basis. Also involved would be:

- * A news editor who would have responsibility for the daily news operation, supervising the reporters, the copy editors (those who first read and edit the copy), the layout or makeup editors (presently called copy editors) and the photographers. This person would answer to the managing editor.
- * An assignments editor who would be in charge of the news-gathering function. He would keep track of all the reporters, would assign them to stories on a daily basis, work with them on scheduling time for long-range projects and special features,

and generally make sure they have the time and resources to do a thorough job of reporting. He'd have to know what every reporter is doing -- and why. He'd also line up the photographers and would act as liaison between the reporter, photographer and make-up editor.

- * Place at least two editors on the news desk whose primary job would be to read and edit copy. They would consult with reporters individually, suggesting revisions to make stories more interesting and readable. They'd also negotiate on behalf of the reporters with the make-up editors on the appropriate play for the stories.

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We are past the point where we need a third person on the city desk -- somebody to keep track of reporters, direct special projects and help read copy. The current personnel don't know where we are, what we're doing; special projects get short shrift, ending up as shallow attempts at depth reporting, and too much of our copy gets rammed through at deadline.

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A new city desk position -- an assignments editor -- would help. Although they make a valiant effort at it, Tom and Bish simply don't have the time to edit copy, deal with the public, deal with the copy desk, deal with the managing editor and still keep track of what everyone is doing, give the right assignment to the right person at the right time, and consult effectively with reporters on the progress of their stories.

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The city editor should schedule a conference with each reporter once a month or every other month. Monthly staff meetings should also continue. We should also have periodic informal gatherings at someone's home just to talk about things in general. It would also be a good idea for someone to look into the possibility of setting up a series of those "group dynamics" psychological workshops to improve communication and cooperation among employees.

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We need more frequent and extensive critiques of the R-G so we can understand what we've been covering, how we've covered it -- and why it was even considered worthy of coverage. I'd like to know what the ME, the city editor and news editor think of our product -- our successes and failures.

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Reporters who cover night meetings should be required to come in and write their stories just as the sportswriters who cover night games are required to come in afterwards to get their stories written. Then let them come back late the following morning. The stories could be processed early in the morning and a rewrite man could assist the city desk in making any necessary phone calls to plug holes and to do any necessary story patching. The result would be a lot more copy down a lot earlier in the cycle.

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Something ought to be done about processing copy in the evenings and letting reporters come to work later on days they have night meetings and on days after their night meetings. Currently there is no incentive for reporters to turn in copy early. If they do, the story is likely to be stuffed in the back of the paper and the reporter is treated as "available" for general duty that morning and can usually count on doing an obit or two, the weather stats, covering a last-minute news conference of dubious value.

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Get out of the notion that (a) if a reporter isn't typing he's not working and (b) get out of the habit of expecting every reporter to be in the office at 7:30 or 8 every morning, whether he has news for that day's paper or not, simply because you want the maximum staff "available" just "in case something happens." If we want general assignment reporters, then get rid of the beat system; if we want competent, professional beat reporters, then let them do their jobs.

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We should hire some truly "general" general assignment reporters who are good all-around reporters to take most of the unexpected, unassigned stuff. The pattern here has been to designate two or three reporters "general assignment" and then gradually load them down with regular assignments until they've developed their own hodge-podge of a beat. Dean Rea said if he were in charge he'd hire one or two guys like Murlin Spencer who would do nothing but sit and wait for the unexpected -- obits, walk-in interviews, rewrites, etc. "That man," he said, "should be the highest paid on your staff, because he would be the most valuable." There's nothing you could do that would improve morale more.

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The news department should hire a person to fill the gap between Vikki and the reporters. This person would be a back-up receptionist and would handle the bulk of the routine news items -- including stories on new officers

in fraternal and civic groups, Eagle Scouts, military stuff, rewrites from the university news bureau, etc. This person could also handle walk-in interviews, take telephone dictates and write a good share of the obituaries. This person could also screen the city desk from a lot of questions and comments from the public.

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It is time we have a full-time rewrite man on duty at night to handle newsroom calls, routine rewrites and police calls. This would relieve the pressure on the police reporter, the city desk, other reporters and, at the same time, provide better late afternoon and evening communications with the public and our news sources.

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On the police beat, we give too much coverage to isolated arrests and incidents and crimes. More time should be spent to keep readers aware of trends -- such as the effect of juvenile crime, the dramatic increase in rapes and other sex crimes, the fate of Ken Wilson, the missing Eugene real estate broker, etc. The following steps could be taken:

- * Eliminate stories on felony arrests simply because they're felonies. Not only do arrest stories on minor crimes take time, they require a great deal of additional time on the part of the court reporter who must follow the suspect each step of the way.
- * Consider writing stories only when the defendant is accused of a major or unusual crime. There are always exceptions, but when the exceptions arise consider them for what makes them unusual and thereby newsworthy. Let's be more selective.
- * Eliminate stories on drug arrests involving marijuana, unless the defendant is believed to be a major supplier or the amount involved is significant. But do stories on all LINT arrests because of the very nature of the agency. It is supposed to go after the big fish and it is a unique example of interagency cooperation. Also do stories on arrests and seizures in cases involving heroin and other serious narcotics.
- * Raise the criteria for stories on reported thefts and burglaries from the present \$500 to at least \$2,000. Thefts of property valued at \$500 aren't all that unusual these days. Instead, let's do stories on the unusual thefts and burglaries and do

occasional features on the problem and what can be done.

- * Injury accidents have also gotten out of hand. I suggest we only cover accidents when the injured persons are in serious or critical condition or if the accident itself is noteworthy or unusual.

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On the court beat, the routine work leaves little time for taking a real look at the direction of the law. There are a number of areas in which I think we have an obligation to explain what is happening, but often these stories don't get written because of the time problem. At present, one-half to two-thirds of the court reporter's average day is spent doing routine things that produce insignificant stories. We need feature stories examining such areas as sentencing alternatives, bail, negotiated pleas, parole and probation, grand juries, testimony of psychiatrists and the new criminal procedure code. All of these require time that routine, insignificant stories are eating up. As a solution, I suggest:

- * Eliminate the court wrap and the regular progress stories on minor cases, replacing them with a sentencing wrap or separate stories on the sentencing of all persons convicted of felonies. This would mean that in most burglary, theft, bad check, marijuana possession and auto tampering cases, we wouldn't do anything at the time of the arrest, arraignment or trial, waiting until the sentencing to do a story.
- * If this were done, a person charged with one of these offenses would never have his name in the paper if he were acquitted or if the case were dismissed. At the same time, a defendant wouldn't be getting his name in the paper every few days. And we'd be more consistent. Under the present policy, it's possible for a person charged with a felony to have his name in the paper only once, while another person facing the same kind of charge can be named as many as nine times while being processed through the system.

Even under this plan, of course, we'd follow the important cases and those that had unusual aspects all the way through the courts.

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We should consider discontinuing the list of circuit court records. For one thing, we don't run a full list of court cases since we don't run district court suits. But more important, there's no follow-up on most of the cases.

I think it's too easy for the public to get the idea that somebody's a deadbeat or that a business is failing because several lawsuits name that person or business as a defendant. In fact, though, it might be merely a dispute over the amount of money actually owed or a case where the plaintiff is actually in the wrong but is harassing the defendant.

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The decision to limit the DUIIL stories and cut back on court records is to be commended and applauded. But let's not stop there.

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We need to re-evaluate our business coverage. There are two approaches. One is to follow the traditional departmentalization approach and have a business page, pages or section DAILY. The other approach is to run business news wild, making it compete for the same news space as other news -- including women, county, city, church, etc.

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We need to run the entire stock and commodity lists or none at all. Running a partial list is like only reporting what happens at half the school board meeting. On the other hand, perhaps this is the time to eliminate the stock lists entirely. They take up valuable space. Besides, any serious investor doesn't rely on the R-G for his quotations.

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We should eliminate the Saturday stock page. There's not that much interest in it and it takes up too much space.

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We need a business column similar and better than the Gerry Pratt column formerly run in the Oregonian. It should be an informal vehicle for reporting what really is going on in the business community. The format should be similar to Blaine Newnham's column.

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One step we have made toward increasing interest and excitement in the paper is the use of special sections on the energy crisis and the new legislation. I think we should always be looking for this kind of thing, and I think it's very important that reporters be given the time to do a good job with the stories.

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We are at the point where we need an Action Line column to respond to the community's interest in consumerism and solution-oriented government. It would take a full-time reporter to do it right.

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Something needs to be done about weekend work, which is now strictly in the hands of part-timers on Friday and Saturday nights and rotated among full-timers on Saturday days and split between full- and part-time staff on weekend summer nights. Logically, we should have a couple of full-time reporters to work Saturday, maybe one during the day and one to help a part-timer at night. Or maybe part-timers can handle it, assuming we have full-time help on call as backup. But the weekend operation right now, especially the Saturday rotation, is a mess. The work is seldom challenging, the system is easily forgotten when the duty is pulled only once every three or four months, and it requires pulling a full-timer away from his regular work one day during the week.

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I would welcome ideas for stories. I'd not be averse to using staff meetings as a forum for taking specific areas -- environment, education, politics, religion, etc. -- for a general discussion of possible story ideas.

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We're often guilty of using technical terms in stories and not explaining what they mean. All of us need to take more care in this.

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The Bethel School Board meetings should be put back under the jurisdiction of the education reporter. He could cover whatever board meeting seems most significant when there are conflicts with Eugene and Springfield boards. The other boards (on conflicting nights) could be covered by phone the next morning.

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The city desk ought to change its practice of coming around on Thursday morning to ask if reporters have anything for Sunday. That's too late to start thinking about Sunday copy.

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More filing space is needed. (Guess who suggested this?)

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The managing editor has too often intimidated the city desk. The ME should encourage the city desk to make its decisions independent of what his reaction will, or might, be.

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Something needs to be done to insure that check calls to the coast and other rural areas are made before deadlines during the weekend. Too often a Friday afternoon accident on the coast has to be warmed over Monday because no one bothered to check on Friday night or Saturday.

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We need to develop a Register-Guard style book and policy guide.

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Work schedules for the copydesk should be made out at least a month in advance.

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The copydesk should be cleaned off to allow more space for day-to-day editing and layout.

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Desk men should be encouraged to work in the magazine periodically -- if for nothing else than to learn Emery's theories on editing and writing.

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For correcting lackluster page design, try to set up a workshop for the R-G page editors with Roy Paul Nelson. We could meet one evening a week for six or eight weeks. Make attendance mandatory.

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Looking ahead to offset, I recommend writing a letter to Editor & Publisher to get a list of newspapers that have undergone redesign in the past five years. Then send away for one-month subscriptions (three or four at a time) so we can begin getting familiar with various design possibilities. We should also determine whether the publisher is willing to bring in a design consultant, perhaps one who designed the best of the papers we see samples of. If it turns out that we have to pull an offset design out of our hat, assign some people to begin work on the project promptly.

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It would be great if the R-G could start using a team approach to the coverage and presentation of major projects and features. A reporter should be able to work with a photographer and a layout editor to figure out the best way to deliver a message or explain a story to the readers.

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Sometimes the pictures most adaptable to a feature aren't selected by the copydesk. It would be better if the reporter and photographers joined in a short conference with the layout man to select photos.

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Let's get the vital statistics off the section page and tell the readers in the index where they can find them. It looks terrible and the copy editors probably would appreciate having a chance to work with a clean page more often.

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At some point, we might consider a more formal procedure for correcting errors, and possibly putting the corrections in the same place each day so they can be found.

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We need to institute a regular weekly TV magazine.

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We should have an op-edit page every day.

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We should run a daily public events calendar on Page 2A. The idea is to provide a brief, but comprehensive, listing of all the meetings of public bodies coming up within the next two days. Essentially it would be limited to time, place and principal subject matter. In the case of routine meetings, the public events calendar would replace the kind of routine precede we now write. Eventually, I would like to see such a calendar expanded to include public entertainment events.

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The time has come to hire an entertainment editor (reporter) to coordinate our coverage of all public entertainment news. This person should be

responsible for news coverage of drama, art, music, and all other public entertainment. This person also might be called upon to write reviews and perhaps produce a regular weekly column -- although the pitfalls of an entertainment column are many.

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Renew the crusade for an editorial artist. Impress upon the publisher that we can't take advantage of the new press and the color capabilities without one.

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To increase the number of R-G produced magazine and feature stories, reporters could be paid \$10 for each story published in the magazine. In addition, they could be given a minimum of a half day a week from regular office hours to work on these stories.

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One thing that adversely affects the newsroom staff is Register-Guarditis. Most people have been with the paper for several years and have little or no experience elsewhere. This could lead to a parochial kind of thinking -- that the R-G way is the only way. One way to develop a wider outlook would be to establish a strong exchange program in which one reporter a year would spend six months or more at another newspaper. Another way would be to send each person around the Northwest for a week or two to visit various newspapers, spending a day with his counterpart on each paper. The information exchanged would be invaluable to this paper. If these suggestions prove too costly, we might consider starting with the "A"s in the Editor & Publisher list of daily newspapers and go through to the end and order one-month subscriptions to two newspapers each month. The papers could be put in a prominent place and all newsroom personnel should be encouraged to look through them.

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I don't believe our librarian is too happy with her job, and I would hate to see her leave. Isn't there some way we can use the knowledge and skills she picked up while earning a master's degree in librarianship? I'm sure she has ideas on how to provide reporters with better resources. And if we head in the direction of more analysis and in-depth studies of our communities, it will be vital for reporters to have access to the kind of resources Marijoy would like to provide.

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The ERG can be the area's biggest and best journalism school. And sometimes that may mean editors "learning" -- that is, hearing the counsel of reporters. For there to be education trickling down or up, the first requirement is "communications" -- which I always thought was just a 75-cent word until ours broke down.

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With the addition of part-time help, with some cutback in traditional coverage, with closer tabs being kept on reporters' hours, and with some effort to send people home or help them out when they're running into long work weeks, I think Belo is under control and working well. Thanks.

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It is a poor practice of our editorial writers to clip a single story from the paper and attempt to use it to write an intelligent editorial. The associate editors should confer more often with reporters who can provide more information.

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Start some sort of training or informational program now on what our news operation is to be in the future.

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I hope you will allow all of the staff members to continue to submit written recommendations to you. It is this kind of involvement that makes for cohesive, cooperative efforts and loyalties.

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And finally:

I ask you to get us all out of a rut. That is your challenge. Use us better. Give us leadership we can follow, and the results will be surprising.

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