

Giving Voice to Values Cases and In-Class Exercise

Instructions: As you read each of the cases below, jot down your answers to these questions. Be prepared to discuss your responses when you come to class.

1. What are the reasons and rationalizations that could prevent the protagonist from giving voice to their values?
2. Who are the stakeholders, and what is at stake for each party, including those who disagree with the protagonist?
3. What levers could the protagonist use to influence those who disagree?
4. What are the most powerful responses to the reasons and rationalizations? To whom should the arguments be made? When and in what context?
5. What could newsroom leaders say or do to address the issues when the protagonist gives voice to their values?

Online Harassment¹

Cassie works for an online news site, writing about popular culture. Reporters in her newsroom are required to use their personal social media accounts to promote the work they and their colleagues produce, by cross-promoting from the main newsroom accounts, engaging with readers in discussions after stories are published, reporting live during events, and so on.

In her time on the job, Cassie has experienced various types of online harassment. People on social media and in comments on her stories have insulted her looks and intelligence, made sexually explicit comments and used slurs against her. And, after writing a story about harassment faced by women in the video gaming industry, the comments have gotten more serious, including death and rape threats. Her address was published on Reddit, and an anonymous account on Twitter also shared the social media accounts of her mother, brother and roommate.

Cassie doesn't know how to handle this onslaught of online attacks. In the past, she has tried various tactics, from blocking people to trying to engage calmly in the replies to simply ignoring them. None of this has lessened the comments. Before, she felt upset, but now she also feels like she could be in danger.

Cassie has asked her newsroom bosses for help but feels like she is being blown off. They have told her to "not feed the trolls" and that she needs to have a tougher skin to work in the online industry. All journalists experience things like this, one more experienced reporter told her.

What should Cassie say, to whom, when, and how should she say it? What should leaders in Cassie's newsroom do or say?

Overworked Reporter²

Tim has worked as a reporter for a metropolitan daily newspaper for two years since he graduated from journalism school. As a sports reporter, he often has to work nights and weekends, sometimes for long hours, to cover games. As a salaried employee, he isn't eligible for overtime.

There have been many staff changes in recent months, and with a hiring freeze in place, everyone in the newsroom is having to do more work. Tim, who started out covering women's basketball and volleyball and men's hockey, also now writes about golf.

This week, an assistant editor on the sports desk quit to go work for a public relations firm. Tim's editor, Suzanne, tells him that they'll now need him to help edit freelance writers who cover high school football and the local minor league baseball franchise, in addition to covering his beats. Tim tells Suzanne that he's concerned about getting everything done with his already busy schedule. She vaguely tells him they'll just need to make decisions on a case by case basis about what needs to be covered and what can be let go. Tim also expresses concern about his lack of editing experience. Suzanne tells him that he's a great reporter and she has confidence he'll be fine at editing as well.

On the one hand, Tim loves his job. He feels lucky to be working in this market, on the beat he loves, at such a young age, when so many journalists have been laid off in recent years. He looks around the newsroom and sees other reporters and editors juggling stories, social media, videos and more. On the other hand, he is worried about burnout and wonders if his editor values him as an employee as much as he values the job.

What should Tim say, to whom, when, and how should he say it? What should leaders in Tim's newsroom say or do?

Woman in Sports Journalism³

He's an important source.

As the chief communications director of a major football team, he has access to players and coaches.

As a new sports reporter, she wants to form a professional connection with him for her stories. But after a few meetings and interviews, his behavior takes an inappropriate turn.

He starts texting her about her personal life and her sexual orientation and continues to do so. He repeatedly asks her out on dates. He continually invites her to stay the night in his hotel room while the football team is on the road.

She tells him his behavior is unacceptable, but he doesn't stop. And it isn't like she can stop speaking with him; he's an important source, and talking to sources is her job.

She tells her editors about the situation, but they tell her that as a female sports reporter, this comes with the job.

And upon reflection, she realizes her editors aren't wrong. She can point to any number of examples where her gender "gets in the way" of her job, or at least gets in the way of other people's perceptions of whether she can do her job. Like the comments on social media telling her she is unattractive and knows nothing about sports. The athlete who discredits her in a moment that reminded her of when Cam Newton of the Carolina Panthers said it was "funny to hear a female talk about routes" following a question from a female reporter in 2017.⁴ And it isn't just the athletes or the public who make these kinds of comments. She'd even overheard a couple of male co-workers making lewd comments about her body and questioning what she actually knew about sports.

But just because her editors aren't wrong about being a woman in sports journalism, she's not sure that they are right that it has to be this way.

What should she do or say to give voice to her values? What should leaders in her newsroom say or do?

Senior Broadcast Producer Tirade⁵

As a newly minted associate producer for a weekly broadcast, Courtney put together a draft of a story about climate change affecting the intensity of storms, such as hurricanes. It was the first script she had written for television. Her senior broadcast producer Victor yelled, "Courtney, come into my office!" As Courtney approached Victor's office door, he stepped into the newsroom and then ripped the script up in front of her and others and yelled, "This is shit! There's no way we can use this, and I don't have time to fix it. How did you get a job here?"

Courtney was shocked by the verbal abuse and did not reply. She was shaken to tears as she returned to her desk. Her coworkers looked at her without saying anything as she passed by.

What should Courtney do or say? What should her coworkers who observed this encounter do or say? What should leaders in Courtney's newsroom say or do?

Shut out from Coverage⁶

Robert joined the newsroom of a prestigious legacy news outlet six months ago after having been a reporter at a small business journal for two years after college. He is now assigned to cover area technology news. He just learned that the editors are assembling a team to investigate how evictions are devastating families locally and nationally. Excited about the project, Robert wrote a detailed email to the lead editor and his direct supervisor pitching ideas and asking to be part of the team. He also pointed out that his family had been evicted from their home when he was in middle school, and he would never forget the shame and hardship it had caused.

He received an email reply that was courteous but vague, thanking him for his enthusiasm. He later learned, secondhand, that he had not been chosen for the team. His frustration is three-fold: He was shut out of the team, he did not get a response from his editor, and he feels retraumatized by exposing what had happened to him in his youth.

He thought he had a good relationship with his editor and colleagues, and he likes being at the news outlet. What should Robert say, to whom, when, and how should he say it? What should leaders in Robert's newsroom say or do?

¹Written by Emily Quigley as a basis for classroom discussion.

²Written by Emily Quigley as a basis for classroom discussion.

³Written by Hannah Ortega, Dr. Kathleen McElroy and Dr. Jennifer L. Jones Barbour as a basis for classroom discussion.

⁴David Newton, "Cam Newton Laughs at Female Reporter Following Her Questions," ESPN, Oct. 4, 2017, https://www.espn.com/nfl/story/_/id/20916366/cam-newton-carolina-panthers-laughs-female-reporter-media-session

⁵Written by Carolyn McGourty Supple as a basis for classroom discussion.

⁶Written by Dr. Kathleen McElroy as a basis for classroom discussion.