

PR SENSE

Communicate the communication

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Megha Gupta

Theme of this Issue
Making of a Journalist

Guest Editor
Megha Gupta

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PR-e-FACE: From the desk of Editor-in-Chief

It's time for introspection by media education bodies!

Now media industry is undergoing a tremendous transition. Technology has provided lot of innovations for presentation of information to the public. The attitude of consumers of journalism has also undergone a tremendous change. Today, people are not interested to read 'four column' news. They want to quickly get the information in capsule format. World over, probably excepting in India, the emergence of Social Media has impacted the mainline media.

Every year, lot of young professionals join the industry after completing formal media education. There is an overall view that media education institutes do not



prepare the students for the changing needs of the profession. Already, media houses are under tremendous pressure. In addition to this, they are also under heavy stress to train the new professionals, who are coming out of the colleges.

This issue is Guest Edited by Ms Megha Gupta, a young journalist from Mumbai. She has taken lot of efforts in studying the various perceptions of students, young professionals and seniors. I am confident that this issue will be of great help to educational institutes, media houses and also to the young professionals.

K. Srinivasan

!

Guest Editor



Megha is a young journalist currently based in Mumbai but soon relocating to Delhi. She studied mass communication in Singapore and has a passion for writing, art and music. She believes that life is about sharing untold stories and making friends out of strangers.

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Hi

Thanks for giving me the great opportunity of guest editing this ezine on 'Making of a Journalist'. I have attempted to highlight the various challenges facing the media profession. You can listen to my video introduction at <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=f2Cr-3tv6vo>

Megha

Snap Survey - Findings

An online 'snap survey' was conducted for this issue during November 2009, to understand the perceptions of young media professionals. 80 young professionals participated in this study. The survey broadly indicated the following:

About Media Training:

- 80% of the professionals want the traineeship to last six months
- 60% found it difficult to enter good media houses. On further enquiry, it was found that the selection process at top media houses was stringent. Many respondents found themselves grappling with the written test and interview
- There is an all-pervasive need to repair media training

What makes a good journalist?

- Good communication skills (85%), good networking (75%)
- Being ethical was supported by only 45%
- 55% feel journalism today is too commercialised and ad-centric

Challenges

- 95% feel mentoring is necessary to become a good journalist. However, close to 50% are not able to find good mentors
- 63% feel that recession has been a blow their journalism career



Convention demands that every field has an education specific to its needs. Of course, eventually whether the education lives up to its purpose, is an entirely different question. The media is no different. However, there have been distinct schools of thought pertaining to education in this field. While some believe that journalists are in-born and hence, education doesn't quite serve a point, others deem the contrary. Nevertheless, the number of media graduates has been increasing in the last few years and the profession has become a popular choice among youngsters.

Here, based on another online survey of journalists with varying experience, across the country, we attempt to shed light on the state of media education and two significant aspects of it – educational training and learning on-the-job.

How is our Media education?

A large number of respondents felt that media education was not sufficient training ground. The problems highlighted were: more theoretical than practical, outdated syllabus and teaching aids, out-of-touch with ground realities and lack of guest lectures from industry. Here are some revealing quotes:

"Functional inputs are very poor. Most journalism graduates emerge with a poor or non-existent understanding of the news process. They have little or no idea of newsroom organisation and responsibilities or workflows in a typical media organisation. Communication skills are very poor and they have not been adequately trained in the craft of writing/ communicating. Ethical inputs are even worse. This is a major area of weakness."

- R Srinivasan, Delhi, over 10 years of experience

"Most of the institutions claim to have an updated syllabus, but still teach DD Basu's press laws."

- Bandita, Chennai, 4-10 years of work experience



"Academic inputs by educational institutions are insufficient because they all teach only the theoretical part of journalism and nothing related to the existing media practice. I did a Business Journalism course but upon joining the industry found a different approach."

- Chakradhar, Delhi, less than 3 years of experience

On the job Training

A majority of the respondents felt that training on the job was an outcome of the individual's initiative in observing and learning, the availability of willing mentors and the organisation he/ she joins. However, there is some struggle involved in the process.

"No news organisation in the TRP or readership race has the time or space to train entry-level journalists. They are often made to do the most menial jobs. The smarter ones - not always smart in terms of their work but good with their PR and interpersonal skills - make it to the next level soon. Others remain at the entry-level and make an unceremonious exit. Gone are the days when senior journalists mentored the new entrants and moulded them for the future. The scene now, especially in the TV medium, is perform or perish, everything else can wait."

- Prem, Mumbai, over 10 years of work experience

"While many journalists learn on their own, proper training and guidance at the entry-level often depends on who the new journalist is reporting to, in an organisation."

- Mauli Buch, Mumbai, 4-10 years of experience

"I strongly believe (that) it depends on the individual and the organisation. I have got good support from my boss and the seniors. But, it also depends on how curious you are to learn things. You need to take initiative, show the courage and give results. This will definitely cause others to guide you. However, you cannot expect your seniors or boss to teach you things all the time. You need to have the ability to learn the best from others and 'keep your eyes and ears open'."

- Devanshi Joshi, Vadodra, less than 3 years experience



Exclusive



In an exclusive email interview, Prof Venkat Pulapaka, SRM School of Journalism and Mass Communication shared his insights on media

education and budding journalists with Megha Gupta. Excerpts:

There is a school of thought, which believes that good journalists are born. Do you personally subscribe to this notion?

I agree to some extent. Though everybody is talented enough to be a journalist, many do not realise that they have the journalistic skills in them and fail to use them to their advantage. With a little bit of external help, I am sure anybody can train himself to be a journalist.

Has the number of students enrolling for such courses increased in the last few years?

Yes. An increasing number of people have been enrolling into journalism programmes since the 1970s in India. However, with new technologies coming in, more students are enrolling in non-journalistic but media-related programmes like visual communication, new media, film production and radio. Comparatively speaking, there are more jobs available in these sectors than in journalism. Hence, the shift.

What are some of the common reasons that students cite for wanting to become journalists/ media professionals?

Broadly speaking, there are four types of students who wish to become media professionals. Type One: These students are the crusaders. They want to change the society. When their dreams are not fulfilled, they are devastated. Type Two: Students wanting to become either a Barkha Dutt or a Rajdeep Sardesai. Unfortunately, they can't. These are the ones who equate media with glamour. When they realise that to be glamorous they need to work hard, they withdraw. Type Three: Students who love the language and are eager to write. However, when they are asked to write, they get scared. Finally, Type Four: The passionate students. They focus on the print media and are keen to learn and share their knowledge. They are small in numbers.

What are some of the challenges that you face in transforming raw students into journalists?

Bloated egos, lack of passion and willingness to work hard

What are some of the qualities of a good media education?

Faculty from the industry, modern lab facilities, student-run publications providing hands-on experience, industry-focused and/ or research-focused syllabus having at least 50 per cent practical component and well-equipped library facilities are the qualities students should look for, before joining a college/ university.



Are there any emerging trends in the field of media education?

India is yet to adopt beat-based training programmes. That may happen later. The emerging trends in specialised training are in the fields of visual communication, new media and radio.

Most media professionals agree that a lot of training takes place on the job. Given this, how does a media education help students?

That is true to a great extent. The Indian education system is to be blamed for this. Our educators think that knowledge

should be acquired from within the four walls of a classroom. For them, attendance and syllabus completion within a rigid time-frame is more important than anything else. As a result students don't understand the fundamentals. This is why media in India is losing its quality and credibility today. The time has come to change all this. In fact, there are some educators who are silently bringing in changes in media education by adopting more realistic approaches to train future journalists. So there is hope.

Prof Venkat Pulapaka can be reached at venkat.pulapaka@gmail.com



Exclusive Podcast



In an exclusive podcast recorded for this issue, Ms Sherry Italia, a journalism student of SIMC, Pune shares her views as to why she joined the journalism course and also her observations about present day media.

Ms Megha Gupta, Guest Editor of this issue conducted an online survey to study the perception of students and young journalists. She shares the findings along with her comments.



Mr R Bhagwan Singh, Consulting Editor, Deccan Chronicle shares his views on (a) The suitability of present media education, (b) Training provided by media houses for the freshers and (c) The attitude of young journalists when they join the profession.

Please click the link to listen to the Podcast

<http://www.poduniversal.com/search?updated-max=2009-11-29T15:06:00%2B05:30&max-results=1>



PRince

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NO MATTER I AM NOT
SO GOOD IN **WRITING...**
BUT I AM VERY GOOD
IN **FIGHTING...**

Editorial





Mentor Musings



The Cambridge dictionary defines mentoring as the act of “helping and giving advice to someone who has less experience than you, especially on your job.” It isn’t merely advising; it also spells certain selflessness, as the advice relates to the highly competitive job arena. Nevertheless, mentoring is not a new concept; in fact it has been prevalent for many years now. An example, in the field of journalism, is the late American broadcast journalist, Edward R Murrow – a pioneer in TV news broadcasting who famously mentored some of the finest talent in American journalism. The web has various references to his protégés, who came to be called ‘Murrow’s Boys’. In India, an example that comes to mind is of Dr Prannoy Roy – his 24-hour news channel NDTV has given Indian journalism some of its most prominent faces – from Barkha Dutt to Arnab Goswami and Rajdeep Sardesai.

However, instances of mentorship comparable to Murrow date back to an age when journalism was still relatively nascent. Today, the times have changed, the pace has increased with the launch of 24-hour news channels and websites and competition has shot through the roof. Naturally, the environment is not conducive to effective mentoring on the job. Yes, people are still noticed and exceptional talent generally receives its due. But is it mentored – not as much. Recently, while talking to a senior, I questioned him on mentorship. Pat came the reply, “There is hardly any time for that. At the most, I can sit and discuss the story and its angle, but no one has the time to nurture a raw fresher.” As such, new journalists – interns, trainees and the like are left out in the cold. It’s a well-

known fact that journalism is a vocation where much of the learning comes on the job. Education equips a person with knowledge, but experience is mandatory to hone the skill. At such a stage, a good mentor is quintessential. But that doesn’t seem to happen for many newcomers. Most trainee journalists lament the sheer lack of honest guidance on the job. Many feel sidelined, as they go about tailing seasoned journalists and receive flak for their first drafts. Although, it will only to be fair to acknowledge that many newcomers, nowadays, are rather impatient and cannot wait to land that major assignment, which will propel them to the big league. Also, in a high pressure, deadline-bound newsroom, it is but natural that people would generally not have the time or the tolerance for ineptitude, which many beginners display.

To come back to the main question then – is mentoring on the decline and who constitutes a good mentor? While opinion is divided on the former, the latter is easy – a good mentor is a senior from the vocation who not only advises on the job, but also helps one climb the ladder of success. A teacher who is secure in his/her success and wants the best from his pupils, with a demand for respect in return. As for solutions, the best that come to mind are active mentorship programmes at media organisations, reward systems for meritorious newcomers and education institutes with established media professionals guiding students academically and otherwise.

By Megha Gupta, Guest Editor



Battling Recession Blues

There are many challenges that face youngsters entering journalism. I still remember the honest confession by my journalism professor at media school, "Getting a good break in this line is a key hurdle facing aspirants." The meltdown has just made matters worse, with many media outfits putting a lid on hiring. Devoid of influential industry contacts and professional know-how, many youngsters are feeling left out, clueless and thoroughly disillusioned. However, the sea being rough is no excuse for the ship to stop sailing.

Taking initiative

It's intriguing to note that many media organisations don't openly advertise the vacancies they maybe having. In fact, a lot of the time jobs go to people with the 'right contacts' who happen to be 'in the right place at the right time'. I certainly don't grudge anyone this stroke of delightful luck. In fact it proves that the key words in this field are 'initiative' and 'perseverance'. Call, inquire about, e-mail and meet as many people from the field, as you can. Attending a good journalism institute provides an ideal opportunity to interact with people from the industry, who may be teaching there. Also, the Internet has many journalism groups that one can join to learn more about the profession and network with other journalists.

Freelance and / or intern

Freelancing and applying for internships are other ways of building one's portfolio. There maybe a freeze on hiring but that certainly doesn't imply a plug on internships. Taking up such offers is an ideal way of learning about the field and meeting more people. It also adds tremendous value to one's resume. Also, a

successfully completed internship can be topped off with a reference from the organisation and perhaps an upper hand for you, when applying for jobs later.

Boosting knowledge

The job demands generalists – people who know something about nearly everything. This stems from voracious reading. Optimists can use the free time between graduation and finding a job, to

hone their talent by brushing up their general knowledge, learning a new skill set like photography or practising what they learnt during the journalism course by attempting to write and/ or edit copy and comparing it to what they see in the actual newspaper or magazine – being an 'Eklavya' of sorts! After all, when the going gets tough, the tough gets going. Oodles of talent, dashed off with a pinch of hope and lots of positivity makes for the perfect recipe. As for the recession – nothing is forever and thankfully, that includes the bad!

- By Megha Gupta, Guest Editor



Exclusive

In an email interview with Megha Gupta, Mr S Narendra, former Information adviser to Indian Prime Ministers and, the Principal Information officer to Government of India shared his insights on the business of media and what newcomers need to know. Excerpts:



Do you believe that the old school, which feels that good journalists are born, still holds value today, or has training become mandatory with changing times and increasing competition?

Unfortunately, the lack of quality training institutions (in this line) strengthens the perception that journalists are born, and it is an inborn gift or aptitude. I hear complaints that even after recruiting so-called 'trained' people, media houses have to re-train them.

What are the qualities of a good media-training programme?

There has to be a mix of education in journalism and skill building training in journalism practice and media management. This perspective is missing in most programmes. Any media education is only a stepping-stone; one needs to build on it with diligent self-learning throughout one's professional career.

In the course of your role as the information adviser to PM and Principal Information Officer to Government of India, you would have

interacted with many journalists. Are there any names of outstanding journalists that come to mind?

My interaction was with different levels of media and their practitioners - owners, owner editors, editors, desk journalists, reporters and foreign correspondents. A majority of them have distinguished themselves in the profession and I cannot single out anyone. Historically, Hornimann of Free Press, Ramarao of Pioneer and Chellapathirao of Pioneer and later National Herald, are famous as fearless editors.

According to you, which qualities distinguish a journalist from his/ her peers and make the person outstanding?

Outstanding journalists have a passion to research facts and gain access to different voices of stakeholders in a story; they report facts honestly without comment in news stories. Media persons are not activists, nor are they partisan but sceptic observers of fleeting moments of history, who write its first draft without bias. They try to gain audience credibility by representing the public voice.

What are some of the trends marking this industry today?

Media economics is continually changing and the profession is adapting to the arrival of new media and a new audience market. Unlike media in developed countries, Indian media is growing at twice the rate of the national GDP. Even print is thriving in India. The same media vehicle is available in multiple platforms -



print in online, print partnering radio and TV and wire agencies in mobile. This media morphing is exciting and opens doors to any one who wants to report, wants to be heard or noticed. I see lot more opportunities to any one aspiring to be a media person today, than any other time in human history.

What are some of the challenges facing this profession and consequently journalists?

In India, specialisation in a particular media, in a particular area or subject is lacking. Further, gatekeepers or sub-editorial desks that check facts, restrain from libellous comment and invasion of privacy, are disappearing. This robs journalism of its credibility. Media is an institution in which people repose faith and credibility, even now. That should be valued and preserved.

Mr Narendra can be reached at sunarendra@gmail.com

Last word

A lot has been written about the making of a journalist. Now, it's time to sign off with some candid 'last words' on why people choose to become journalists.

"Today journalists want the best of everything. They only want to become reporters. It is hard to find motivated and interested sub-editors. They come with lots of dreams and after 3 or 4 years, get disillusioned and change careers. I wish they would all come to the field with an open mind, try their hand in all aspects of the profession and then decide where they stand and what their strong points are. Instead of trying to smartly overtake their seniors, they must spend their initial years in journalism reading and improving their skills and learning from other's experience." – A Journalist from Chennai

"They regard the media field like any other profession and anticipate an income-level equivalent to that of an engineer or doctor. But, they are exploited by media firms, kept as trainees for a long period and a nominal amount is given as stipend. Leading television channels have not yet implemented journalist's wage board recommendations." - C O T Azeez, Kozhikode



PRetty - Why Journalism?

Media Studies student Sherry Italia (left), shares her candid observations on reasons aspirants furnish for pursuing journalism.



As a media studies student, I've often come across this typical question asked at us, young media aspirants by our professors - "Why do you wish to take up journalism?" Here are some responses accompanied

by the first thoughts that crossed my mind on hearing them.....

At least 10 trainees admitted, "Because it's my passion!"

- Too old and common an answer!

A spectacled geek asserted, "Because people have got rid of the stereotype that medicine and engineering are the only two existing and honourable areas of expertise."

- Ok that sounds sensible!

An aloof soul commented, "Because I love interacting with people, I am a people's person"

- How antithetical!

An extrovert foodie expressed, "Because there is a fire in my belly."

- That's acidity darling!

An experience-stricken guy said, "I wish to carry on the family tradition. Both my parents were journalists."

- Wow! It runs in his blood!

A Shakespearean and Keats fan recited, "For the sheer joy of writing!"

- How poetic! Looks like her life thrives on ink.

A tormented and suppressed mortal lamented, "My parents forced me to get into this field, and it was their choice!"

- Shocking that such cases exist. How submissive can people get?

A die-hard romantic replied, "Because journalism is my 'first love'!"

- Dude, don't you know that girls hate to play second fiddle!

A 'jack of all trades' admitted, "Because I couldn't get through my law and medicine entrance exams."

- How conveniently multitasking! What varied interests. It's like asking King Kong for his beauty secrets.

A pious and astrologically inclined girl said, "Because I was destined to take up this course. My *kundali* says so."

- If only time of birth could decide a lifetime! We would never commit any regrettable deeds or even sins for that matter and finally heaven would be overpopulated!

How sarcastic yet realistic – the reasons youngsters give for taking up this vocation. While some are relatable, others are beyond imaginable. But that just proves that each one of us thinks differently about our choice to enter journalism. As far as I am concerned, picking journalism was a random decision, a tiny experimentation, an unanticipated move, a choice made in complete consciousness, which I now feel is the best step I took all my life!

As in any creative vocation, the reason behind pursuing journalism lies in following one's instincts and listening to one's heart.

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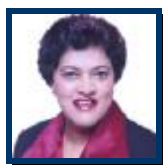
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