



# News, Improved

How America's Newsrooms Are Learning to Change

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## Chapter 7 The Future

*Chapter 7 of News, Improved reviews findings from the Tomorrow's Workforce project, exploring why newsrooms fail to invest in training, and what everyone -- from beginning journalist to publisher -- can do about it.*

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Journalists need more training. They know it. Their bosses know it. Many corporate leaders also know it. But training, a force that both accelerates change and makes it less difficult, is still a low priority in the news industry.

In a new survey -- funded by the Knight Foundation in 2006 and released in 2007 -- nine in 10 American journalists say they need more training. Nine in 10 newsroom executives agree and say they need more training themselves. This hunger to learn ranges from craft skills, including new media, to ethics and management.

Yet only three in 10 news organizations say they are doing more training today than five years ago. At most news organizations mid-career training is stalling or even vanishing. It's as though only a third of America's newsrooms intend to have a future. Overall, training in the news industry hasn't changed in the five years since Knight funded "Newsroom Training: Where's the Investment?" Then, as now, the No. 1 source of dissatisfaction among working journalists is the lack of training.<sup>1</sup>

### **Newsroom Learning: A New Divide?**

Tomorrow's Workforce started in 2003 with \$2 million from the Knight Foundation and a single question: Other professions invest heavily in training for their employees, why not the news industry? Our hypothesis: The problem was newspapers' profit-driven corporate owners.

We discovered the answer was far more complex. More money for training will help, but won't fully satisfy journalists' hunger for professional growth, nor fully prepare news organizations for an increasingly challenging marketplace. A new question arose: Can the news industry thrive in the ever-changing world of digital media relying primarily on scarce, random, charity-financed training? Our answer: Not likely.

Tomorrow's Workforce wanted to explore with partner newsrooms the elements and practices that can – and have – made training more effective. In the end, we developed a framework that can serve great journalism and attract larger audiences.

We lay out that framework in the chapters of this book: Lead and communicate. Set goals and measure progress. Improve culture. Involve staff. Make the news more readable, useful,



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convenient, relevant. Train. Teach. Learn. Innovate. And then train some more. Repeat continuously.

The future of news will belong to those who build it. Tomorrow's Workforce sought partners who said they wanted change, then urged them to learn how to change even more. The good news: More daily newspaper editors are investing in strategic training, editorial innovation and collaborative efforts to improve newsroom culture. The bad news: Too many others still are not. The average newsroom spends no more on training today than it did four years ago, despite growing evidence that training fuels innovation.

Corporations including McClatchy, Cox, Gannett, Lee Enterprises and Scripps have stepped up and provided training to their member newsrooms. However, their efforts sit atop an industry-wide attitude that training is something charities give away, not a primary responsibility – and indeed the business necessity – of owners.

We found, though, that even if owners don't come through, local publishers and newsroom editors can give their newsrooms more training – without large budgets. Small newsrooms from Bloomington to La Crosse to Bakersfield have found ways to provide a lot of training – and publish better newspapers and Web sites as a result of it. Training in the newsroom is often seen as a poor alternative to training off-site. Our partner newsrooms demonstrated that's not always the case.

Each newspaper should set its own training priorities based on its unique staff, market conditions and goals. Yet industry leaders also see a need to concentrate professional development in areas that foster reinvention. Mary Nesbitt of the Readership Institute identified four crucial areas: craft and skills, managerial and human relations, business literacy, and innovation and product development.

Journalism academics must play an important role in advancing training for student journalists and professionals. For now, however, many journalists are on their own. Things are improving in some newsrooms, yes, but individual journalists yearning for growth might need to look out for their own learning.

Imagine newsrooms whose leaders and staffs see the possibilities of innovation and who have the skills needed to accomplish them. Imagine news organizations so connected to their communities that citizens see them as powerful – and necessary – tools for maintaining civil society. Imagine it, and work toward it.

Chapter 6 of *News, Improved* includes highlights of a new Knight Foundation survey about training based on interviews with more than 2,000 journalists and news executives.

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<sup>1</sup> John S. and James L. Knight Foundation, “*Newsroom Training: Where's the Investment?*” (April 2002)