Preserving Our Readers' Trust

A Report to the Executive Editor

Last fall, roughly a year after your acceptance of the Siegal Committee recommendations on our newsroom's culture, you asked us to take a fresh look at some of the steps we had taken to increase readers' confidence in The Times. You asked about anonymous sources and whether the paper had done everything possible to minimize their occurrence and maximize our candor when using them. You asked whether we could cut our error rate by a significant amount and thereby give readers greater confidence in our reliability. You asked us to look beyond our walls and investigate our industry's best practices: Are other leading papers taking steps that we should adopt to reinforce our readers' trust in us? And you were notably concerned about the din of outside criticism, about what seemed to be an unceasing drumfire from both left and right, amplified by the passions of the presidential election campaign and the wondrous reach of the Internet. Was it any longer possible to stand silent and stoic under fire?

This committee has brought together 19 highly experienced news people (11 supervisory editors, 6 reporters, a copy editor, and a photographer), again under Al Siegal's chairmanship. The committee roster was intentionally skewed toward Washington and investigative reporting, where Times people wrestle daily with the hardest sourcing questions under the most exacting pressures.

The committee as a whole has met for extensive discussion 10 times since mid-November. We created five subcommittees to tackle separate facets of our assignment. Among other things, we investigated how other papers deal with anonymous sourcing, how they seek to minimize the errors that cause corrections, and how they use the Web to keep in touch with readers. One subcommittee assembled half a dozen noted journalists from outside the Times for a searching discussion of perceptions of bias or favoritism. Another tested the e-mail channels that the paper has set up for reader feedback (with dismal results, we regret to say). The full committee heard from Dan Okrent, Gail Collins and Andy Rosenthal. All five subcommittees talked at length with people in our newsroom.

What have we learned? First, there is much the paper can do to consolidate its readers' trust. We start with being more open and forthcoming. When we began this assignment, the election-year shouting was still ringing in our ears. It was hard to resist a defensive crouch. With passing months, however, that negativism has faded and given way to a conviction that explaining ourselves actively and earnestly to our various publics can only strengthen the bond between the Times and its loyal readers.

Just as important, there is an immense amount that we can do to improve our journalism and cement our readers' confidence in us. We must be yet stricter about anonymous sources. We must reduce the garden-variety factual errors that corrode our believability. In an ever more complex world, even as we must speak with authority, we must strengthen and better define the boundary between news and opinion.

Finally, nothing can be fixed permanently. Good intentions can't stand up to the rough and tumble of daily journalism. We should thank that colleague who stubbornly champions these principles when it isn't popular to do so. All of us, from executive editor to beginning reporter, must come to work each day with fresh vigilance. Earning trust is a lifelong commitment. Our principal recommendations and discussion follow. We are eager to get on with the job.

1. A Dialogue With Our Publics

Recommendations

I. **The executive editor and the two managing editors should share responsibility for writing a column that deals broadly with matters about the newspaper. The column should appear regularly in a fixed spot, ideally every other week and perhaps on Page 2 of the Week in Review or alternating with the Public Editor in his space.**

II. **The newsroom should establish a coherent, flexible system for evaluating public attacks on our work and determining whether they require a public response, and in what form. That system should rely centrally on department heads, in conjunction with a designated masthead editor.**

III. **Nytimes.com should conduct frequent Q & A forums with department heads and other senior editors and should set up mechanisms to give readers greater access to key source documents, interview transcripts and databases used in stories and graphics. The Web should also explore the possibility of creating a Times blog that promotes a give-and-take with readers while satisfying the standards of our journalism.**

IV. **We should create a single, robust speakers bureau that recruits, trains and pays volunteers from across the newsroom to speak to community groups, associations, churches and campuses and wherever else appropriate.**

V. **The newspaper should improve our interaction with television and radio programs. We should devise a strategy governing when and where it makes sense for us to be on TV and radio; require reporters (rather than just encourage them) to consult supervisors before making an appearance; and provide reporters with TV training. Editors should be urged to monitor these appearances periodically and counsel reporters if they improperly cross the line into opinion, conjecture or partisanship.**

Discussion

We strongly believe it is no longer sufficient to argue reflexively that our work speaks for itself. In today's media environment, such a minimal response damages our credibility. Critics, competitors and partisans can too easily caricature who we are and what we do. And loyal readers gain no solid understanding of what the truth really is.

Therefore, we need to be more assertive about explaining ourselves — our decisions, our methods, our values, how we operate. We need to do this with regularity and in a variety of forums. We particularly need to do this at times when we are <u>not</u> under attack. But we should also be more vigorous about defending our work when it is unfairly maligned.

To achieve this aim, the newspaper needs to create a new set of tools — tools that give us flexibility in how we respond to critics; tools that help us communicate with audiences that we currently make little or no effort to reach; tools that make the newspaper more transparent and credible; and tools that give our journalists assurance that they will be defended when they are subjected to unfair attack.

This aim can best be met by making use of all our assets — the newspaper, the Web, New York Times television and ourselves. It can be met most effectively if the effort is led by the newsroom, with support and advice from our corporate communications, marketing and legal departments. Though more can be done, the recommendations above represent the most important steps.

We fully accept that there are those who love to hate The Times. Though there may be no dissuading them, often there is value in engaging with more open-minded critics. And beyond that debate, productive communication is certainly possible with a much larger body of people — readers and nonreaders alike — whose opinions of The Times are not so fixed. We should focus our efforts on them, with the goal of making it far easier for them to see more than unanswered attacks on our ethics and professionalism.

While we think this approach will improve our credibility, we also see a need for steps to manage the risks inherent in such a public endeavor. We do not want editors and reporters bogged down responding to every complaint or criticism, no matter how whimsical. We do not want to be sucked into partisan fights. We are also especially concerned about the risks of sending reporters on TV to talk about their work. (Note the recent libel case against The Boston Herald, in which broadcast comments were invoked to impugn a journalist's motives.) On occasion, our reporters have been lured into offering opinions or making statements that went beyond their reporting and their expertise. We believe the solution lies in new training, new internal checks and closer coordination between the newsroom and our corporate communications department.

2. Reaching Out to Readers, Improving Our Use of Sources.

Recommendations

I. Create technology that allows readers to e-mail reporters and editors while shielding our staff members from spam and harassment.

Every article on Nytimes.com should include a link that lets readers contact the reporter. We should carry a prominent "Contact Us" box near the front of the paper, preferably on A2, and on Nytimes.com every day. We should expand and maintain a staff directory on Nytimes.com that will also have links to the dialogue boxes that allow direct communication even to reporters and editors who are withholding their addresses.

II. Encourage the practice of reporters' interim and final checks with sources to verify specific points.

We do *not* advocate having sources look over entire articles. In fact, in some cases showing a source *any* portion of a draft may be unwise for legal or other reasons. But with most stories, reporters should be encouraged to run facts and quotes and even interpretations by sources whom they consider trustworthy, to the extent that time allows.

III. Encourage reporters to seek feedback from sources after a story has appeared, but leave this technique entirely in their hands.

We considered the practice of some papers that send follow-up questionnaires to story subjects. We concluded that this risks undercutting the reporting staff. But in the hands of the reporter, an informal follow-up for helpful feedback sends a signal of strength and confidence.

Discussion

1. E-Mail

The Times makes it harder than any other major American newspaper for readers to reach a responsible human being. Making it easier for the public to approach Times people has numerous benefits. It sends a message to the paper's readers — our customers — that we are indeed accessible. It also opens up another avenue for reporters and editors to get ideas and tips that can lead to stories.

The links we advocated above for articles on Nytimes.com will let readers address Times people without opening the door to spam. When a reader clicked on such a link, a "dialogue box" would open on the screen. The box would forward an e-mail to the reporter without revealing a specific e-mail address. While we encourage all reporters to participate, the dialogue boxes could be programmed instead to forward e-mail to the department of any reporter who declined.

The "Contact Us" box in the main news section and on Nytimes.com should list departmental e-mail addresses. In view of our experience with individual desks, we propose that all the departmental e-mails flow to a single person in the newsroom who will be responsible for politely acknowledging them and, when appropriate, forwarding them to the proper reporter or editor. We should also expand the existing staff directory on Nytimes.com, and actually maintain it.

2. Reporters' Checks With Sources

Avoiding mistakes is our first priority, of course, far better than correcting them. To that end, we strongly recommend the more frequent use of interim and final checks with sources before an article goes to press. It's perfectly normal for reporters to check back with sources during reporting. What a final check adds is to narrow the focus to verifying facts or quotations or wording that we know we intend to use.

This practice, sometimes known as "bulletproofing," is spreading at our paper and at many other papers, yet there are lingering taboos. It is important to spell out what a reporter should and should not do. We do *not* advocate having sources look over entire articles (though we respect the discretion of experienced reporters dealing with trusted sources). With intricate technical or scientific information, it may make sense to double-check entire paragraphs or graphics word for word.

No hard and fast formula exists for this. Some reporters are quite formal in presenting individual facts or quotations, while others take a more casual, matter-of-fact tone. Some insist on using e-mail, to leave a trail, while others prefer to go over the information on the phone. Trusted sources may be treated one way; unfriendly sources, another.

Whatever the technique, the reporter must make it clear from the start that he or she keeps control of the story, and that the process does not open the door for the source to edit quotations or demand in retrospect that something be moved off the record. (And fact checkers, where we use them, will of course be given less discretion than writers themselves can exercise.)

The range of a reporter's options should be laid out in a written guideline that becomes part of our training and orientation materials.

3. Post-Publication Checks

A number of newspapers send questionnaires to people who have been mentioned in articles, asking them to assess the accuracy and fairness of the account. We have not seen enough benefits to justify the practice, and the downside is worrisome. We have no wish to undercut our reporters or have them doubt that their editors are solidly in their corner. We also do not wish to invite disingenuous sources to challenge facts or quotations that were indeed sound. Such a system is still a rare exception among news organizations that aspire to national standing: a system that depends on newsmakers to return questionnaires would be hard to carry out consistently.

We do, however, see value in encouraging reporters to do their own more informal post-publication checks with sources for helpful feedback. The practice can yield tips and lessons for future articles and build long-term relationships with sources. It can also bring out mistakes that some sources would not have brought to the paper's attention on their own.

This practice, too, should be laid out in a written guideline for training and orientation.

3. Unidentified Sources: Some Next Steps

Recommendations

I. The executive editor and managing editors should authorize new mechanisms to apply our policy effectively and enforce it energetically. They should instruct department heads to put into place editing procedures to keep unidentified attribution to a minimum. These procedures should support three broad objectives:

- Reporters must be more aggressive in pressing sources to put information and quotations on the record, especially sources who strongly desire to get their viewpoint into the paper.
- Editors must be more energetic in pressing reporters to get that information on the record. They must also recognize that persuading reticent sources to put their names behind sensitive disclosures is not easy; it may slow the reporting.
- When anonymity is unavoidable, reporters and editors must be more diligent in describing sources more fully. The basics include how the anonymous sources know what they know, why they are willing to provide the information and why they are entitled to anonymity.

II. The policy should be uniform and adhered to across all sections of the paper, honored in features as well as in hard news. It should apply to all our writers, both staff and freelance. The system should include recognition of exemplary staff efforts.

III. The orientation for new reporters and editors should emphasize the policy, and it should be reinforced in management training for the newsroom staff. Every staff member, new or veteran, should receive a letter from the executive editor reiterating the paper's commitment to enforcing this policy.

Discussion

A year after the newsroom adopted a more stringent approach to unidentified sources, we found considerable progress. The paper has done better in reporters' sharing the identity of their sources with their editors; in telling readers more about the nature and motivation of anonymous sources; and in fostering a collective desire to limit our reliance on anonymity.

Still, The Times plainly finds it hard to curtail its dependence on anonymous sources. Much work remains to be done within our walls — and between reporters and their sources — before our handling of anonymous sources fulfills the ambitious goals outlined in the newsroom policy. Dan Okrent, the public editor, told the committee that when readers complain to him, anonymous sourcing is the No. 1 killer of our credibility. We cannot afford to ignore that finding.

We do not seek to eliminate unidentified sources entirely. Our research on the policies and practices of other news organizations suggests that it is unrealistic and futile to expect that anonymous sourcing can be eliminated. A number of papers, including USA Today, make a great effort to keep anonymous sources out of their pages. In some instances, editors and reporters told us, strict compliance can delay breaking a story and bring the frustration of watching competitors beat them into print.

We do believe that some stories should be held back until sources can be tightened and more fully disclosed. Sometimes our strong distaste for anonymous sources may place us at a competitive disadvantage; on occasion we may lose exclusives to other papers. Our policy reflects the conviction that such losses will be far outweighed by the long-term gains in credibility and reader trust.

In some instances, however, anonymous sources serve our readers by giving them important information not otherwise available. Some stories, especially those involving national security and law enforcement matters, cannot be obtained without assurance to sources that their identities will not be disclosed. We would deny our readers critical information about vital issues if we barred the use of anonymous sources outright.

In that regard, our charge from the executive editor included the question whether we should instruct our reporters to walk out of anonymous background briefings. We do believe the paper should encourage reporters to push back by objecting to the ground rules as the briefings begin, especially those conducted by public affairs spokesmen whose job is normally to speak on the record. We do not believe, however, that we have much to gain by unilaterally boycotting such sessions or by trying to work in concert with other news organizations — which in any case are notably reluctant to join such a group effort.

If quick gains are to be made, they are in eliminating the needless and often reflexive use of unidentified sources in trivial instances. Almost every issue of the paper includes anonymously-attributed information of no great moment. That material could easily be cut or, with some extra effort, put on the record. Many instances involve government officials saying routine things. Others have business executives, athletes, or cultural figures making expendable comments about their fields. Some articles quote anonymous bystanders who happen to be interviewed at crime scenes, sporting events, political rallies, theatrical premieres and other events. No department or section of the paper is immune.

As just one example among multitudes, a sprightly feature described the lengths that assistants to celebrities go to keep their bosses happy and satisfy their every whim. Its reliance on an unnamed source left readers wondering whether the source had worked with the star in question and knew the star's petty preferences or was simply passing along second-hand gossip, or even whether the source was seeking to present the star unflatteringly for self-serving reasons.

The point is not that particular individuals failed, but that the newsroom as a whole often fails to honor the paper's stated policy in the course of reporting and editing. Too often we do not trouble to challenge our sources to speak for attribution even when a request to do so can be easily accommodated. In the chain from reporter to reader, too few editors realize that it is their job to challenge evident violations of our policy.

One notable deficiency in our present practice has been a shortage of practical guidance on how to persuade reticent sources to put more information on the record. This committee has assembled some suggestions, largely from practices that some colleagues have found effective. This primer should become a part of our training materials.

4. Reducing Factual Errors

Recommendations

I. Newsroom management should issue a strong statement clarifying fact-checking responsibilities and reiterating that avoiding error is everybody's responsibility. To resolve any lingering uncertainty, it should state that:

Writers are accountable for the accuracy of every fact in their copy. Backfield editors are responsible for overall accuracy and fairness and for enforcing standards. Copy editors should check verifiable error-prone facts as time allows and consult with writers about all factual changes.

Writers should be expected to read edited copies of their stories, as well as headlines, captions, graphics and related elements when practicable. All staff members have a duty to notify a responsible editor of any possible errors in copy, before or after publication in print or on the Web.

Though our training classes are making inroads, there remains a surprisingly widespread belief in many parts of our operation that fact-checking is someone else's job.

II. A newsroom-wide corrections tracking system should be set up to detect patterns of errors and take action to avoid repetition. An editor should be appointed to manage it.

We strongly believe that the database should be used to identify patterns of errors and ways to avoid them, and emphatically *not* as a way to compile error counts or rates by name. The editor in charge would use the data to analyze trends in errors, to propose better practices and to inform staff training.

III. We should take greater advantage of electronic tools, both for gathering and checking information and as part of the production and corrections processes.

Instruction on using electronic fact-checking tools should be encouraged for all and made mandatory for new staff members and newly promoted backfield editors.

We need to find ways to encourage tapping into the expertise of our staff. A searchable system should be set up to show names and telephone extensions of people with language skills or special expertise, whether military knowledge or an interest in opera or in firearms or car repair.

We should make it easier for readers to contact us with complaints about errors. A form or a dialogue box on the Web should walk readers through the complaint process; the "Tomorrow" house ad that ordinarily appears on the weather page should be clearer about how to report errors in the paper.

We should establish and diligently use an electronic system to distribute photos and caption information to copy desks promptly, as soon as picture editors have made their selections.

We should work to develop plagiarism detection software sophisticated enough to fit our needs and should let the staff know that we would use it not routinely but to check any plausible suspicion or accusation.

IV. Nytimes.com should improve its electronic posting and archiving of corrections.

Corrections should be posted as promptly as possible, even before they appear in the paper. A correction should appear in the text of the online article, with a note appended to inform readers of the change.

Nytimes.com should stop its current practice of keeping outdated and possibly inaccurate multiple versions of news reports posted for several days. The final New York print version, when it becomes available, should supersede all others.

Discussion

1. Error Tracking.

Last year we published almost 3,200 corrections. We can do better. Our goal should be to eliminate error, beyond acknowledging it and correcting it.

The proposed database would track the types and causes of errors that lead to corrections. The data would come from a mandatory form filled out by the individual(s) responsible for an error. It would include a draft of the proposed correction, with an explanation of how the mistake happened and how it could have been avoided.

Raw counts of an individual’s errors can be simplistic and misleading. We are greatly concerned that making them a routine part of evaluations would breed resentment and undercut the goal of having everyone recognize that the system's purpose is to reduce error. Only masthead editors, department heads and the editor in charge of overseeing the error-tracking system should have access to names in the database. (This is not an argument against the current and growing practice of discussing accuracy in written and oral performance reviews, provided the approach is not blindly numeric.)

The editor in charge of the tracking system would prepare occasional memos (or intranet postings) about accuracy — notably including praise for good catches — and would work with departments to establish periodic corrections bulletins or similar efforts at the desk level. This job could be part of a senior editor's duties, or it could be given to a rotation of midlevel editors, who would return to their regular duties with a deeper understanding of our best accuracy practices.

2. Plagiarism Detection.

A technological deterrent to plagiarism has great appeal. Unfortunately, the current technology is not yet refined enough to allow newspapers to use databases like Nexis to determine whether material has been plagiarized. As just one example, today’s software cannot distinguish between a plagiarized story and stories that share the same quotes from the same press conference.

But we feel there is promise. The Times has discussed these difficulties with Lexis-Nexis, which has begun a partnership with I-Thenticate, a plagiarism software company mainly serving academia. The goal is a new and more discriminating service that could, on demand, check our copy against all of Lexis-Nexis.

5. The News/Opinion Divide

Recommendations

I. Standardize a typographical format for news analysis and other reportorial pieces that are authorized to convey voice and viewpoint. Establish a more prominent rubric to run with all such pieces, wherever they appear.

The executive editor should appoint a team of reporters and editors to review, define, and standardize all such labels. The definitions, once issued, should go into the stylebook. The paper should devise clearer, more explicit rubrics and layouts to set off news analysis and viewpoint pieces of any sort.

II. Clarify the place of columnists in the news pages.

At a minimum, columns should be prominently labeled as commentary, a more personal expression than interpretive or analytical reporting. They should be set off distinctively, by more than ragged-right typography. We need uniform devices to make columns stand out no matter where in the news pages they appear.

A few columnists write conventional news and analysis pieces as well as commentary. They and their editors should take care that their reported pieces observe the usual constraints and be free of editorializing.

III. Create a procedure for systematically watching the cumulative impact of continuing stories that risk conveying an impression of one-sidedness.

The department heads, who already meet regularly, should monitor the overall tone of high-profile coverage that extends across many desks (social issues, politics, Mideast diplomacy, for example). Along with masthead editors, they should regularly assemble an array of editors and reporters to focus on issues involving events and topics that cut widely across the paper. The goal is not only to avoid appearing one-sided but also to find ways to present more contrarian and unexpected viewpoints in our news pages.

IV. Be more alert to the nuances of language when writing about contentious issues.

Our training and orientation programs should include seminars for reporters and editors on avoiding tendentious language in news stories, features and analysis. The seminars should make use of reporters who have proved adept at covering emotionally charged topics in a neutral way. The post-mortems should highlight lapses that look like favoritism.

The standards editor should report to the entire staff regularly, perhaps every three or every six months, on language issues brought to his attention or dealt with by the masthead.

V. Enlarge our working definition of what constitutes news.

Our news coverage needs to embrace unorthodox views and contrarian opinions and to portray lives both more radical and more conservative than those most of us experience. We need to listen carefully to colleagues who are at home in realms that are not familiar to most of us.

We should increase our coverage of religion in America and focus on new ways to give it greater attention, such as expanding the Saturday report beyond the religion column.

VI. Expand the scope of our goals in advancing newsroom diversity.

Our paper's commitment to a diversity of gender, race and ethnicity is nonnegotiable. We should pursue the same diversity in other dimensions of life, and for the same reason — to ensure that a broad range of viewpoints is at the table when we decide what to write about and how to present it.

The executive editor should assign this goal to everyone who has a hand in recruiting.

We should take pains to create a climate in which staff members feel free to propose or criticize coverage from vantage points that lie outside the perceived newsroom consensus (liberal/conservative, religious/secular, urban/suburban/rural, elitist/white collar/blue collar).

Discussion

1. Labeling Commentary

We can hardly expect readers to understand the grab bag of labels we use to identify various types of articles in the paper. Many of us do not understand them either. (How does a Washington Memo differ from a White House Letter? What distinguishes News Analysis from an analytical news story? What's the difference between Critic's Notebook and TV Watch?)

It is important to differentiate columnists in the news pages from those on the Op-Ed pages, who enjoy much greater leeway. Columnists and critics in the news pages are permitted to express professional points of view about what they cover. Sports columnists are free, indeed expected, to offer opinions on sports events and figures — but only provided their opinions stay within that realm. A sports columnist ought not to give a gratuitous opinion about foreign policy.

2. Monitoring Cumulative Coverage

Though we have our lapses, individual news stories on emotional topics like abortion, gun control, the death penalty and gay marriage are reported and edited with great care, to avoid any impression of bias. Nonetheless, when numerous articles use the same assumption as a point of departure, that monotone can leave the false impression that the paper has chosen sides. This is especially so when we add in our feature sections, whose mission it is to write about novelty in life. As a result, despite the strict divide between editorial pages and news pages, The Times can come across as an advocate.

The public editor found that the overall tone of our coverage of gay marriage, as one example, "approaches cheerleading." By consistently framing the issue as a civil rights matter --

gays fighting for the right to be treated like everyone else -- we failed to convey how disturbing the issue is in many corners of American social, cultural and religious life.

3. Diversifying Our Vantage Point

Too often we label whole groups from a perspective that uncritically accepts a stereotype or unfairly marginalizes them. As one reporter put it, words like *moderate* or *centrist* “inevitably incorporate a judgment about which views are sensible and which are extreme.” We often apply “religious fundamentalists,” another loaded term, to political activists who would describe themselves as Christian conservatives.

We particularly slip into these traps in feature stories when reporters and editors think they are merely presenting an interesting slice of life, with little awareness of the power of labels. We need to be more vigilant about the choice of language not only in the text but also in headlines, captions and display type.

Many staff members say that the paper covers breaking news well, but that it needs to take additional steps to cover the country in a fuller way. The national desk is already moving in this direction, but we encourage more reporting from the middle of the country, from exurbs and hinterland, and more coverage of social, demographic, cultural and lifestyle issues. We would also welcome even more enterprise reporting beyond New York, Washington and a handful of other major cities.

Nothing we recommend should be seen as endorsing a retreat from tough-minded reporting of abuses of power by public or private institutions. In part because the Times’s editorial page is clearly liberal, the news pages do need to make more effort not to seem monolithic. Both inside and outside the paper, some people feel that we are missing stories because our staff lacks diversity in viewpoints, intellectual grounding and individual backgrounds. We should look for all manner of diversity. We should seek talented journalists who happen to have military experience, who know rural America first hand, who are at home in different faiths.

4. The News/Editorial Membrane

At the suggestion of many staff members, we reviewed the history and practice of two-way traffic between jobs on the editorial pages and in the newsroom (at levels as high as executive editor, and less lofty). Some colleagues have suggested that when editorial writers and editors return to the newsroom, they can be seen as bringing the opinions they expressed in editorials. We concluded that limited movement is both necessary and consistent with the paper’s tradition — that the best reporters and editors are mindful of their roles and understand the professional requirement to switch gears when making such a move. A ban on movement runs the risk of creating stagnation in the much smaller editorial department, or of the paper’s losing valued talent by denying editorial writers an outlet for variety and renewal. Such a ban would also foreclose the publisher’s option to use opinion positions as important way stations in preparing journalists from the newsroom for greater responsibility. Four of the last six executive editors have spent time on the editorial board or the Op-Ed page.

5. Daily Journalism and Magazine Journalism

In the course of our work we heard expressions of concern about the differences between magazine journalism and the standards of the news columns. Our magazine’s journalism stirs some strong feelings inside the newsroom. Some who work for the daily paper contend that the magazine’s standards are looser and too tolerant of opinion and, further, that the difference tarnishes the entire paper. Magazine editors responded that though magazine journalism is inherently more personal than conventional news coverage, it is equally exacting.

To instill greater confidence in our standards throughout our staff, we propose organizing a periodic opportunity for editors and reporters from the newsroom to talk with their counterparts on the magazine over a range of professional issues. We also advise bringing the Book Review (which is actively seeking voices across a wider spectrum) into the discussion, as a way to improve our coverage of important ideas and intellectual controversies.

The Credibility Group

Allan M. Siegal, Chairman

David Barstow, Investigations Group
Charles Blow, Art Department
Katherine Bouton, Magazine
Dana Canedy, National Desk
Rebecca Corbett, Washington Bureau
Steve Crowley, Washington Photo Staff
Kevin Flynn, Metro Desk
Steve Holmes, Education Desk
Christine Kay, Investigations Group
Charles Knittle, Metro Copy Desk
Patrick LaForge, Metro Desk
Michael J. Leahy, Senior Editor
David Leonhardt, Business Day
Tom Redburn, Business Day
Eric Schmitt, Washington Bureau
Terry Schwadron, Newsroom Technology
Philip Taubman, Washington
Duff Wilson, Sports
Diane Cardwell, Metro Staff

Fred Andrews, Consultant

May 2, 2005