

The Oregon Code of Ethics for Journalism

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PREAMBLE

"Not only all arts and sciences but all actions directed by choice aim at some good."

—Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, I:1.

We believe in the teaching of the great ethicists that a general state of happiness and well-being is attainable throughout the world; and that this state is the chief end-in-view of society.

We recognize an instinct in every good man that his utterances and his deeds should make a reasonable and continuous contribution toward this ultimate state, in the possibility of which we reiterate our belief, however remote it may now seem.

We believe that men collectively should also follow the principles of practice that guide the ethical individual. For whatever purpose men are associated, we believe they should endeavor to make the reasonable and continuous contribution that distinguishes the ethical man. And all the agencies and instrumentalities employed by men, singly or collectively, should be based upon the best ethical practice of the time, so that the end-in-view of society may thereby be hastened.

Of all these agencies the printed word is most widely diffused and most powerful. The printed word is the single instrument of the profession we represent, and the extent to which it is shaping the thoughts and the conduct of peoples is measureless. We therefore pronounce the ethical responsibility of journalism the greatest of the professional responsibilities, and we desire to accept our responsibility, now and hereafter, to the utmost extent that is right and reasonable in our respective circumstances.

Accordingly we adopt for our guidance the following code which shall be known as the Oregon Code of Ethics for Journalism.

I.

SINCERITY; TRUTH

The foundation of ethical journalism is sincerity. The sincere journalist will be honest alike in his purposes and in his writings. To the best of his capacity to ascertain truth, he will always be truthful. It is his attitude toward truth that distinguishes the ethical from the unethical writer. It is naturally not possible that all writing can be without error; but it can always be without deliberate error. There is no place in journalism for the dissembler, the distorter, the prevaricator, the suppressor, or the dishonest thinker.

The first section of this code therefore provides that we shall be continuously sincere in professional practice; and sincerity as journalists means, for example, that

We will put accuracy above all other considerations in the written word, whether editorial, advertisement, article or news story.

We will interpret accuracy not merely as the absence of actual misstatement, but as the presence of whatever is necessary to prevent the reader from making a false deduction.

In an ethical attitude toward truth we will be open at all time to conviction, for the sincere journalist, while fearless and firm, will never be stubborn; therefore we will never decline to hear and consider new evidence.

If new evidence forces a change of opinion, we will be as free in the acknowledgment of the new opinion as in the utterance of the old.

We will promote a similar attitude in others toward truth, not asking or permitting employes to write things which as sincere journalists we would not ourselves write.

II.

CARE; COMPETENCY; THOROUGHNESS

Inaccuracy in journalism is commonly due more to lack of mental equipment than to willfulness of attitude. The ill-equipped man cannot be more competent as a journalist than he can as a doctor or engineer. Given an ethical attitude, the contribution that each journalist makes to his community and to society is nearly in ratio to his competency. We regard journalism as a precise and a learned profession, and it is therefore the second part of this code that:

By study and inquiry and observation we will constantly aim to improve ourselves, so that our writings

may be more authentic and of greater perspective and more conducive to the social good.

We will consider it an essential in those we employ that they not merely be of ethical attitude, but reasonably equipped to carry out their ideals.

We will make care our devotion in the preparation of statements of fact and in the utterance of opinion.

We will advocate in our respective communities the same thoroughness, sound preparation and pride of craft that we ourselves desire in ourselves, our employes and our associates.

We are accordingly the active enemies of superficiality and pretense.

III.

JUSTICE; MERCY; KINDLINESS

Liberty of the press is, by constitution, statute and custom, greater in the United States than anywhere else in the world. This liberty exists for our press so that the liberty of the whole people may thereby be guarded. It so happens that at times the liberty of the press is exercised as license to infringe upon the rights of groups and of individuals; because custom and law have brought about certain immunities, it happens that in haste or zeal or malice or indifference, persons are unjustly dealt by. Yet the freedom of the press should at all times be exercised as the makers of the constitution and of the statutes, and the people themselves through their tolerance, have intended it. The reputations of men and women are sacred in nature and not to be torn down lightly. We therefore pronounce it appropriate to include in this code that:

We will not make "privileged utterance" a cloak of unjust attack, or spiteful venting, or carelessness in investigation in the cases of parties or persons.

We will aim to protect, within reason, the rights of individuals mentioned in public documents, regardless of the effect on "good stories" or upon editorial policy.

We will deal by all persons alike so far as is humanly possible, not varying from the procedure of any part of this code because of the wealth, influence or personal situation of the persons concerned; except as hereinafter provided.

It shall be one of our canons that mercy and kindness are legitimate considerations in any phase of journalism, and that if the public or social interest seems to be best concerned by suppression, we may suppress; but the motive in such instances must always be the public or social interests and not the personal or commercial interest.

We will try so to conduct our publication, or to direct our writing, that justice, kindness and mercy will characterize our work.

IV.

MODERATION; CONSERVATISM; PROPORTION

Since the public takes from the journalist so great a proportion of the evidence upon which it forms its opinions, obviously that evidence should be of high type. The writer who makes his appeal to the passions rather than to the intellect is too often invalid as a purveyor of evidence because his facts are out of perspective. By improper emphasis, by skillful arrangement, or by devices of typography or rhetoric, he causes the formation in his reader's mind of unsound opinion. This practice is quite as improper and frequently is more harmful than actual prevarication. Through this code we desire to take a position against so-called sensational practice by acceptance of the following canons:

We will endeavor to avoid the injustice that springs from hasty conclusion in editorial or reportorial or interpretative practice.

We will not overplay news or editorial for the sake of effect when such procedure may lead to false deductions in readers' minds.

We will regard accuracy and completeness as more vital than our being the first to print.

We will try to observe due proportion in the display of news to the end that inconsequential matter may not seem to take precedence in social importance over news of public significance.

We will in all respects in our writing and our publishing endeavor to observe moderation and steadiness.

Recognizing that the kaleidoscopic changes in news tend to keep the public processes of mind at a superficial level, we will try to maintain a news and an editorial policy that will be less ephemeral in its influence upon social thought.

V.

PARTISANSHIP; PROPAGANDA

We believe that the public has confidence in the printed word of journalism in proportion as it is able to believe in the competency of journalists and have trust in their motives. Lack of trust in our motives may arise from the suspicion that we shape our writings to suit non-social interests, or that we open our columns to propaganda, or both. Accordingly we adopt the following professional canons:

We will resist outside control in every phase of our practice, believing that the best interests of society require entire intellectual freedom in journalism.

We will rise above party and other partisanship in writing and publishing, supporting parties and issues only so far as we sincerely believe them to be in the public interest.

We will not permit, unless in exceptional cases, the publishing of news and editorial matter not prepared by ourselves or our staffs, believing that original matter is the best answer to the peril of propaganda.

VI.

PUBLIC SERVICE AND SOCIAL POLICY

We dispute the maxim sometimes heard that a newspaper should follow its constituency in public morals and policy rather than try to lead it. We do not expect to be so far ahead of our time that our policies will be impracticable; but we do desire to be abreast of the best thought of the time, and if possible to be its guide. It is not true that a newspaper should be only as advanced in its ethical atmosphere as it conceives the average of its readers to be. No man who is not in ethical advance of the average of his community should be in the profession of journalism. We declare therefore as follows:

We will keep our writings and our publications free from unrefinement, except so far as we may sincerely believe publication of sordid details to be for the social good.

We will consider all that we write or publish for public consumption in the light of its effect on social policy, refraining from writing or from publishing if we believe our material to be socially detrimental.

We will regard our privilege of writing for publication or publishing for public consumption as an enterprise that is social as well as commercial in character, and therefore will at all times have an eye against doing anything counter to social interest.

We believe it an essential part of this policy that we should not be respecters of persons.

VII.

ADVERTISING AND CIRCULATION

We repudiate the principle of "letting the buyer beware." We cannot agree to guarantee advertising, but we assume a definite attitude toward the advertising that we write, solicit or print. We believe that the same canons of truth and justice should apply in advertising and circulation as we are adopting for news and editorial matter. We therefore agree to the following business principles:

We will cooperate with those special agencies whose business it is to raise the ethical standard of advertising.

We will discourage and bar from our columns advertising which in our belief is intended to deceive the reader in his estimate of what is advertised. (This clause is intended to cover the many phases of fraud, and unfair competition, and the advertising of articles that seem likely to be harmful to the purchaser's morals or health.)

We will not advertise our own newspaper or its circulation boastfully, or otherwise in terms not in harmony with the clauses of this code of ethics. (This is intended to cover misleading statements to the public or to advertisers as to whole number of copies printed, number of paid-up subscribers, number of street sales and percentage of local circulation.)

We will not make our printing facilities available for the production of advertising which we believe to be socially harmful or fraudulent in its intent.

To the foregoing code we subscribe heartily as a part of our duty to society and of our belief that the salvation of the world can come only through the acceptance and practice by the people of the world of a sound and practical ethical philosophy.

THE BEND BULLETIN IS A MEMBER OF THE STATE EDITORIAL ASSOCIATION AND SUBSCRIBES TO THIS CODE OF ETHICS.