



Duties of a Journalist in a Media Organization

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Abstract

Most of the constitutions of democratic countries give freedom of speech and expression, but it is not absolute freedom. They have to function under certain limitations. To become a successful journalist certain qualities are needed. They should possess, or inculcate them through practice. Qualities of good journalist are nose for news, perseverance, inquisitiveness, understanding of human behavior, physical fitness and mental alertness, command over language, technology driven, good communication skills etc. Subsequently, duties of a journalists are upholding media ethics, should work in public and national interest, work dispassionately, objectivity, accuracy, authenticity, should be skeptic to the information that flows to them, work with commitment, and staying away from spreading fake news etc. A journalist has to deliver his duties with responsibility and within the precincts of law of the land. Otherwise, the profession would lose its credibility. Media is fourth estate in democracy. It has to reflect the happening in the society with utmost care.

Key Words: Media ethics, Qualities of a Journalist, Duties of a journalists, Press Council of India, Perseverance, Freedom of Speech and Expression.

Introduction

“The fundamental objective of journalism is to serve the people with news, views, comments and information in matters of public interest in a fair, accurate, unbiased and decent manner and language.”

-----**Justice G. N. Ray, Former Chairman, Press Council of India**

Journalism is a demanding profession in the media industry and all those who practise journalism are known as journalists. It is definitely one of the fastest growing and exciting careers, as journalists get the chance to interact with powerful and influential people, who are active in decision making. Journalist has no limitation in covering stories.

A journalist covers the information about politics, business, entertainment, arts, culture, sports, crime, history and economics etc. He edits what others write, he comments, criticizes and puts together the news gathered from all over the world based on news values. An editor writes editorials on important issues and gives his perspective.

Qualities of good Journalist

It is said that a journalist is both eyes and ears of a news organization. He knows the pulse of the society. It is not possible to strictly prescribe the qualifications and characteristics of the ideal journalist. However, to be a successful or at least respectable journalist following qualities, training and experience are essential. So, that they would be able to discharge their responsibilities with confidence, courage and competence: –

Freedom of Speech and Expression: Indian Constitution gives, Right to freedom of speech and expression, under article 19(1) a. More than citizens, it is important for journalists to use freedom of speech and expression. And, they have to work within the limitations under art 19(2). If Journalist cross the limit, then they will have to face defamation, Official Secrets Act violations and other legal problems. So, journalist should know, what can be published and what not. A journalist should have thorough legal knowledge.

Curiosity and desire to learn: First of all, a journalist should have curiosity, a strong urge and willingness to learn something new and share it to the world. They must also possess a broad range of interests and understanding. They should continuously improve their knowledge and skills, which can enhance their confidence. Journalism as a profession is changing at a faster pace, because of impact of technology. Journalists should be innovative in presenting news and should also be able to connect with audience or readers.

Understanding of human Behavior: An ace journalist should have insight into verbal and non—verbal communication of human behavior. A journalist should have some knowledge on Psychology, Sociology, Anthropology, Criminology, Economy and other behavioral sciences to understand the society well.

Physical fitness and mental alertness: The profession of journalism demands long hours of duty. He should be available 24 x 7 and 365 days a year. He should be physically fit and mentally strong to face any unforeseen eventualities on the field. Hence, he should have excellent health and inexhaustible stamina to chase challenging assignments. He must have the analytical ability to sift news from the information available in plenty. And, one who is not mentally alert is likely to flop in the profession. Many news organizations don't cover

health insurance and accidental insurance to the journalist. So, journalist should have a spirit of sacrifice.

Communication Skills: A journalist requires strong communication skills for persuading the sources to talk to them and reveal crucial information. They should be able to make the source comfortable while disclosing the facts or the source.

Un-disclosing the source: A journalist should not disclose the source of his information to the news organization or public. As it may harm the source.

Command over language: 'The pen is mightier than the sword'. A journalist should be a wordsmith. One cannot be journalist unless and until he has a strong passion and deep love for language – words both spoken and written. Appropriate words give a platform for expression. He should be able to write in a simple, correct and brief language and also edit and proofread the stories even at the last minute. He should make his writing or speaking a delightful experience through language, ensuring the highest standards. A journalist can stir emotions of the readers or viewers with language.

Academic and professional qualification: A degree in any discipline arts, commerce or science followed by diploma in Journalism is desirable for pursuing profession of journalism. If he specializes in diverse areas such as politics, finance and economics, investigation, culture and sports, he will have a distinct advantage. Knowledge of computer is also an added advantage. Intensive training in print media or electronic media houses will nurture a fresh graduate with skills and necessary knowledge. Profession of journalism needs practical training to cope up with deadline pressure.

Decision Maker: A journalist is required to make quick decision about the news angle of a news story to be presented to the readers or viewers. He should have an eye for essential details which are to be included in the report, omit unimportant or irrelevant matters. He should always explore the news story from readers or viewers' interest.

Multitasking: A journalist should be a multitasker depending upon the position he is holding in the news organization. Sometimes, he has to act as a reporter, a sub-editor, a feature writer, a photojournalist etc. depending on the circumstance.

Technology Driven: A journalist should be tech-savvy. Journalists should be able to create content and upload them on the website and should also be familiar with live online reporting and real - time blogging. He should be able to use latest technological devices and computer

applications useful for the profession. His profession needs quick learning and unlearning as technology demands.

Perseverance: A good journalist must possess both mental and physical determination. He should have the ability to grasp things quickly and be able to report at shortest possible time. If he comes across obstacles in reporting as information gathering is a tough task, still he should persevere in his endeavor until he succeeds.

Temperament: A journalist should be temperamentally well framed and organized in such a way that he should not get frustrated or irritated when he has to wait for hours to cover news or interview a person. He should always maintain his coolness even in adverse circumstances.

Explorer: The main task of a journalist is exploring the unexplored. Uncovering the information that was not known before, and if left unexplored, the world would have never known.

Pressure: A journalist should have the ability to cope up with stress while working in deadlines. He has to report events in unfamiliar circumstances. He should not allow people to emotionally attack him. Sometimes, too much pressure may lead to health issues.

Influence: A journalist should not get under the influence of malicious people, who may feed misleading information. He should always cross-check information received by him for veracity. Only credible information has to be reported. Otherwise, he may lose his job.

Catalyst: A journalist should act as a catalyst to bring about a positive change in society in a sustained manner by impartially upholding journalistic activities. There are many experiments carried out to bring positive social and economic change. Our Village Chattera is a classic example. The Hindustan Times acted as catalyst in bringing positive change in village Chattera.

Spontaneity: A journalist should be spontaneous in his work. Hence, speed is the key issue as he has to cover the issue live at the site of the event. He should think fast, decide fast and write or type fast. A slight delay in the information could be a drastic loss for the audience and news media organization.

Narration: A journalist should be able to explain as to why and how a particular trend or an issue developed that is being reported in the news.

Unbiased: A journalist should be impartial in his perspective, while reporting an event. He should provide both sides of a news story without angularity. Finally, leaving it to the discretion of the prospective audience for their own judgment.

Commitment: A journalist ought to be committed to citizen's welfare and development. He should be committed to professional ethics and law of the land. At any cost objectivity should be maintained in reporting news. Especially, during communal or caste disturbances etc., a journalist should report with caution, so that he should not stoke fires of hatred among the public. He should promote harmony and public order.

Loyalty: Loyalty defines one's success in the long run. Journalists should be loyal not only to the citizens in terms of dissemination of news but also to the employers. They should not disclose any confidential information to the people outside the firm especially to the rivals.

Motivator: A journalist should be able to motivate the people to lead the society and make them capable of changing the social, economic and political events of a nation. A journalist should be a crusader and enlighten the weaker sections of the society, of their rights and motivate them to assert their rights.

Credible: In the process of collecting data, people will give all sorts of information which might be or not be accurate. A journalist should be able to identify and justify the truth. Thereby preventing the dissemination of misleading news. They must develop the ability to obtain a report from credible sources. At any cost, credibility of the news should not be sacrificed.

News Sense: It is the primary quality of newsman. Journalists should have a nose for news and a strong news sense. So, that they can identify the news of public relevance depending upon the news values. He should be able to compare various news values and decide, which story to pick.

Clarity: A journalist should have clarity of thought and expression. He should be clear of, what he intends to convey to the readers or audience. A person who is confused cannot tell a story to others.

Skepticism: Skepticism or inquiring mind is another necessary quality which a journalist should cultivate. They should not take anything for granted. They should have an unwavering mind to doubt any information coming across until undeniable proof is found. A journalist should be more vigilant with events happening around him. Many people try to feed wrong

stories to reporters for their own selfish interests. Many a time they fall into such traps in good faith. They should have enough skepticism to avoid such plots.

Punctuality: It is a good habit for the journalist to be punctual for his job. Be it his assignment or his office. If they are not punctual, they may miss something for which they may have to depend on secondary sources. It is always better to be on or before time rather than late.

Calmness and patience: This quality which helps a journalist a lot. He has to test his endurance. The voluntary self-control allows one to endure waiting, provocation, injustice, suffering or any of the unpleasant vicissitudes of time and life. Most of the time, a reporter waits for someone, or something and patience gives him the willingness to wait without becoming restless or anxious.

Imagination: A journalist should have a fertile brain, creative thinking and imagination. Through creative thinking and imagination, presentation of news has to be done. Innovative methods have to be adopted in presenting news, so that readers or viewers don't get bored.

Farsightedness: In general, an intelligent envisioning of the future helps journalists. A journalist and media organization with foresight can initiate research into issues, which may be important. News Organizations can have their content ready to be published, when the issues crop up. It motivates public to debate and generate public opinion. A reporter with foresight can think ahead and prepare for eventualities. Curtain raisers for national and international events need lot of time to prepare.

Fearlessness and Frankness: These qualities help journalist in asking unpleasant questions and taking risks to find out truths. Nobody gives a story on a platter. The reporter has to probe an issue with dedication to get a good story. Unless a journalist is fearless and frank, he can never investigate an issue thoroughly and file a good story. As every story is replete with danger of touching a powerful people.

Diligence: Journalist should be diligent. Their jobs require painstaking exertion, alertness and dedication to the task taken. They have to use critical wisdom, while writing or editing copy.

Network: A journalist should maintain network with cross section of the society. As they can act a source of news or information.

Investigation: Criminal stories need thorough investigation. A crime reporter should maintain utmost secrecy of his sources. For example, Deep throat, source of Watergate scandal in America was kept secret by Woodward and Bernstein of Washington post.

Duties of a Journalist in a Media Organization

To be able to identify and discuss the role and responsibilities of a journalist successfully, one needs to understand the meanings of the twin words 'role' and 'responsibility' and how they play out in the context of journalism as a profession. The oxford online dictionary defines the word 'role' as the function assumed or part played by a person or thing in a particular situation and 'responsibility' explained as the state or fact of having a duty to deal with something or of having control over someone. Journalists have to perform many roles, which spurs their responsibilities.

Here some important duties of a journalist are discussed:

Press Council of India has prescribed Norms of journalistic conduct to be followed by all journalist in media organizations. Few of them are discussed below.

Public Interest and Public bodies: A journalist has a right to bring out corruption and irregularities in public bodies. Primarily, he has to gather irrefutable evidence from inquiry and verification reports from concerned authorities. He must also obtain voice of the accused to remain objective.

Criticism of public figures and music reviews: A journalist should not cast personal aspersions on the credibility of the public figure. A journalist can objectively comment on the work of the public figure only.

Carefulness against identification: A journalist while reporting crime related to rape, abduction or kidnaping of women or sexual assault on children or raising doubts over personal character or chastity or privacy of women, the names, photographs of the victims should not be published.

Glorification of violence or social evils to be stopped: A journalist should maintain utmost caution reporting violence or social evils in the society.

Maintaining national interest: A journalist should maintain self—restraint in reporting news, comments or information pertaining to state or society, or rights of individuals. Reasonable restrictions have to be kept in mind so as to not harm anybody in the society.

Misconduct: Blackmailing or threatening to malign someone through media organizations leads to professional misconduct. It is violation of norms of journalistic ethics.

Independence of journalists: A journalist should not take up administrative or commercial side of the media organization. It is unethical and influences the independence of journalist's functional duties.

Journalists should eschew sensationalism and trial by media. Fair trial is paramount than freedom of speech and expression. If a fair trial is not conducted, it may harm the accused irreparably.

Objective, factual and sensitive: Journalist should report news in objective, factual and sensitive way. So that it doesn't hurt the public. Especially regarding HIV AIDS or any medical ailment.

Accurate language or terminology: News reports have to be reported in accurate language or terminology be it medical, science or any subject matter. Due precautions have to be taken, otherwise there is a possibility of misunderstanding.

Financial journalist: Journalists should not accept gifts, loans, trips, discounts and other financial considerations, which may lead to influence his performance of duty.

Election reporting: A journalist should cover the elections freely and fairly. He is not supposed to accept gifts or financial considerations from the candidates. He should not canvass for any particular candidate. Right to reply on a news report must be given to all the candidates in the elections.

Reporting Duties: (Interviewing sources) before journalists can write about a subject, they must first gather information usually by conducting interviews with people involved in or having knowledge on the subject. They may also have to go to the scene of an event, such as a crime or an accident, to interview witnesses or law enforcement officers and to document what they see. It is the responsibility of the journalist to follow up additional information and the latest developments on a news story or article previously published.

Research and Development: Journalists conducts frequent research and live surveys so that the social, political and economic trends of the society can be known in advance that can directly contribute to the growth and development of the nation. They also spend time perusing press releases and developing story ideas; verifying facts; researching and investigating a single topic for in-depth, comprehensive articles; cultivating sources and relationships; and interviewing subjects.

Observation: A journalist should keenly observe the world around him to pitch in story ideas that interest the audience. Observation will be beneficial when the journalist has to gather information to understand an event or a story better. Journalist as a committed observer may view things from a different perspective. A journalist's keen observation helps him in understanding issues in-depth and provide him with a vision and broader understanding.

Make News Interesting and Relevant: A journalist must engage its audience or readers to get them interested in whatever the news is presented to them in interesting and meaningful way. So that readers would not miss whatever they need to know. Important and relevant events have to be conveyed to them, so that they would consume with interest.

Understanding the audience: A journalist should know the nerve of the audience and understand their pulse. Content should be simplified to enlighten the people making important news attractive as it is rightly said '**an informed citizen is an engaged citizen**'.

Serving as watchdog: Serving the public as a watchdog, journalists are always expected to work in the interest of the broader audience and not to satisfy the capricious curiosity of a selected few, be it political groupings, business gurus or corrupt bureaucrats. As the fourth estate, this should be the practice to ensure credibility and integrity. Good faith with the reader should be the foundation of all good journalism worthy of the name.

Entertain: A journalist also interviews the celebrities and publishes excerpts of their interviews. He should not quote out of context to make news sensational. They also cover news related to fine arts, music, movies, and sculpture, photography and dance forms.

Legal Responsibilities: In addition to serving the public interest, journalists must also follow the law, especially regarding the confidentiality and privacy of the people they interview or write about. For example, while journalists often tape record their interviews to ensure accuracy, laws generally make it illegal to record a conversation without the permission of the other party. Legislature reporters and Court reporters must strictly follow Code of Conduct otherwise; it may lead to contempt of court or legislative.

Ethical Responsibilities: Some aspects of a journalist's job are not subject to any law but are just as important. Journalists must strive to present an accurate, well-balanced explanation of the stories they cover. For example, they must give all sides of an issue, and to conduct extensive research and talk to several sources knowledgeable about the subject. If they present only popular opinion, or if they conduct minimal research without fully exploring the matter, they don't give readers and viewers the information they need to understand the implications of the event or issue.

Accuracy: With the unique role of making projections to the public in the form of news, journalists have the responsibility of being accurate in their practice. The existence of law and professional ethics requires journalists to be careful in their reportage to remain credible and free from legal tussles such as libel and defamation. Facts and information gathered from sources cannot be skewed to satisfy any selfish interest and cannot be degraded to create negative perceptions. References should be duly attributed when necessary, and reports presented without personal interpretations.

Dispassionate: To promote accuracy, journalists should present the news in an unbiased manner by presenting basic facts and all sides of the happenings to the audiences and readers. They should be then left free to draw inferences or make judgments. Journalists should understand the uniqueness and the importance of their roles in society and therefore, should perform their functions as such with the utmost professionalism.

Upholding the truth through verification: A journalist is responsible for reporting the truth, not because he is inherently unbiased but because he supports the importance of objective verification. This means that he should consistently test every fact used in his story, including researching all information shared with him by his sources. Strict adherence to verification ensures that personal and cultural biases don't sneak in and take over-reporting.

Meeting Deadlines: A journalist should strictly follow the deadline allotted to him and should complete his task by the time frame keeping in mind his accountability towards the society.

Coordination: Coordination is the key for any successful profession. Journalists are required to coordinate with different departments at the desk and allocate work depending upon the individual capabilities of the team.

Team Management: Journalists should be able to work in a team by coordinating with the crew members to provide complete information to the audience. They should be able to provide guidance and lead the team in all the endeavors impartially.

Conclusion

Working as a journalist is not an easy job to be taken lightly. Journalists research, write, edit, proofread news, views, news stories, features and articles thoroughly and without bias for use on TV and radio or in newspapers, magazines, journals in print or online. All this is possible if they have essential qualities. If you aspire to be the mouthpiece of his audience, then you should understand your role, the audience and the power of your words. Strive every day to uphold the journalistic integrity that comes with the power of the pen and work to achieve the goal of delivering the most complete and balanced story possible to your audience.

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