

CNHI Newsroom Guidelines

The practice of journalism subjects people and institutions to intense and constant scrutiny and, therefore, must itself maintain high standards of professional conduct. And while it is impractical to write rules to cover every ethical situation, these general guidelines are intended to help CNHI newsrooms live up to this obligation. They should be complemented by common sense and individual conscience.

General Conflicts of Interest

All CNHI journalists should avoid working on or making decisions about news in which they have a personal stake. Some specific rules:

Outside Work: CNHI journalists should not work for the people and institutions they cover. Any outside job must be cleared by the Editor or Publisher of your paper and should not cause a conflict of interest or appearance of a conflict of interest. Writing, editing, making photographs or creating illustrations for any news organization in competition with CNHI or your CNHI paper are prohibited outside work.

Community Involvement: CNHI journalists are encouraged to be involved in worthwhile community activities, so long as this does not compromise the credibility of news coverage. Do not use CNHI or your CNHI paper's connections to benefit you or your family, or to benefit a third party.

Political Involvement: CNHI journalists should not serve on government bodies or become involved in partisan political organizations. They should avoid involvement in demonstrations and social causes that would result in a conflict of interest, or the appearance of a conflict. Making contributions to political or quasi-political groups, signing petitions and so forth, should be undertaken with great care and good judgment. Keep foremost in mind the need to protect your newspaper's reputation as an objective source of news.

Financial Investments: CNHI journalists should not benefit monetarily from news decisions they make. They should not enter into business relationships with news sources or the subjects of news stories. Where there is any doubt as to the appropriateness of a business investment, it is your duty to seek clarification from the Editor or the Publisher.

Personal Relationships: CNHI journalists should not write about, photograph or make news judgments about any individual related by blood, adoption, civil union or marriage or with whom the journalist has a close personal, financial or romantic relationship. An exception is made for first-person stories and columns.

Gifts and Other Considerations

Gifts: We pay our own way. So do not accept gifts, favors or anything else of value intended to influence news coverage or that would give the appearance of obligating you to a news source or organization. Unsolicited gifts of more than token value should be returned. If that is not practical, then donate such gifts to a community nonprofit organization or to your newspaper's charity auction. Occasionally, someone may buy you lunch, a cup of coffee or a drink as a simple courtesy. You should undertake an appropriate opportunity to repay the courtesy.

Tickets: CNHI journalists may accept free tickets to an event they are covering if it is an event at which free admission is customarily given to the working press. Do not solicit free tickets to something you have no plan to cover for your paper or Web site.

Paid Trips: Paid trips should be accepted only in the rarest of circumstances and with the approval of the paper's Editor or Publisher. Any story based on a paid trip should disclose that fact.

Review Materials: Books, DVDs, CDs and similar materials sent to your CNHI newspaper or Web site for review are the property of the paper and Web site. The newspaper can appropriate them to the reviewer or keep them on file for future reference. Those materials that are not reviewed should be donated to a public or a charitable organization that can put them to good use.

Fairness

CNHI newspapers and Web sites strive to make their work fair, accurate, thorough and in context. Other guidelines:

Dealing With The Public: Treat the public with courtsey, compassion and respect. Treat inexperienced sources, particularly children, with special sensitivity.

Anonymous/Confidential Sources: The use of material from unnamed sources can harm the credibility of a newspaper and should be used only as a last resort and strictly in cases where there is a compelling public interest at stake. In the rare case in which a confidential source may be necessary, check with your paper's Editor or Publisher BEFORE a pledge of confidentiality is extended. In some cases, it may be necessary to get a signed legal waiver from the source if the CNHI journalist is likely to end up before a grand jury. Any information used from a confidential or anonymous source should be corroborated by other sources.

Photos: Do not alter the content of a photo. Any illustration created using a photo should be obvious and clearly labeled as such. Exercise caution in "set up" photographs. Avoid the impression they were spontaneous moments.

Misrepresentation: Deception should be avoided. Do not break the law in pursuit of the news. Be fair and responsible in your reporting and editing. Never knowingly publish a falsehood. Do not write about an event we did not attend in a way that gives the impression we did.

Paying For News: As a general rule, we do not pay for news. If an extraordinary circumstance arises, check with your Editor or Publisher.

Plagiarism: Plagiarism, or the lifting of someone else's words, is unacceptable, as is fabrication of information. Attribution is mandatory when using the work of others.

Corrections: Errors should be corrected promptly. CNHI journalists have a responsibility to alert the appropriate editor if they become aware of a possible error.

Responsibilities: As newspapers and Web sites serving many communities across the country, CNHI newsrooms carry special responsibilities. They include:

- Listening to the voiceless.
- Avoiding all acts of arrogance.
- Engaging the public with politeness and candor.

Bill Ketter
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