



IS THE MEDIA OUR FRIEND OR OUR FOE?

As we struggle to learn of all that is occurring around us, we try to absorb the information available to us. The sources we have relied upon have been print, broadcast and now Internet media. As we see the media moguls gobbling up the competition, we need to step back and take a careful look at the job they are doing. Rightfully so, as free people, we hold sacred the right of freedom of the press. However, seeing what is happening today, one must question how some appear to be using this right as a shield against criticism when held accountable for the delivery of information. As their customers I believe we have right to demand accuracy and balance and have the right to some positive content in reporting.

When one opens the morning paper or watches the eleven o'clock news we are struck with the fact that almost nothing reported is really newsworthy. Robberies, murders, celebrity arrests, rape, fires, explosions and the like do nothing to enhance our well being or teach us anything. This type of sensationalism is simply a report card of human stupidity, which showcases the level of depravity whose bottom limits are constantly pushed lower and lower. On a positive note, there are many fine high quality media industry leaders who do make an effort to positively disseminate information but they are the exception rather than the rule.

When the daily reporting of news lacks balanced positive content and accuracy, or remarks are intentionally taken out of context for shock purposes in reality we are simply being lied to. The personal agendas of those who control these outlets are simply attempting to mold our opinions and decision making to their personal point of view. Too often we are simply misled. When intelligent people are given information from supposedly trusted sources, we logically arrive at conclusions which are wrong and may actually result in hatred, bigotry and violence.

When we step back and take a close look at this problem we understand that first and foremost these media entities are businesses. The job of the editor is to bait us into buying their newspaper over the competition or similarly to keep our radios or TVs tuned to their station. Unfortunately, in some cases, they accomplish this by catering to the primitive human impulses and feeding us violence and negativity in huge doses.

When the news network spends hours on end reporting on a Lindsay Lohan what message are we sending to our children? When days are spent reporting a Columbine massacre how does this benefit us and who is seeing this, with a similar mental illness, who may also commit this same heinous crime as they crave publicity. Doesn't the media bear some responsibility when this crime is repeated? When the news reports the capture of a terrorist cell through cell phone chatter or an informant, does this not alert the enemy to be careful and to avoid cell phone use or to take precautions against spies? Or what about the report that terrorists are using small liquid undetected components to create a bomb on a plane. Aren't we inviting them to invent some new device as we search millions of passengers for liquids? Remember the WWII phrase "a slip of the lip can sink a ship"? Aiding and abetting the enemy is a

crime. Is the people's right to know (or what the media wants you to know) outweighing the states' responsibility to guarantee safety and security of millions of its citizens?

We collectively allow ourselves and our families to be exposed to this assault without objection. Politicians, community and religious leaders seem to fear the media's wrath. After all by innuendo or a suggestion of impropriety, a person's entire life, reputation and career can be ruined by one headline. Unfortunately, the apology or retraction never seems to get the same exposure as the accusation.

Freedom of press is of course paramount but we, John & Jane Q Public have some rights also. It's time for a bill of rights regarding information dissemination to be instituted, which can serve as a guide for minimum standards for the media industry to follow universally. We have a rating system for the film industry - why not one for the media industry? A percentage of the news should be positive. When was the tried and true journalistic principles of reporting who, when where why and how replaced by opinions, private agendas and personal editorials?

Let's consider creating an international award of excellence that recognizes those media entities that meet or exceed the standards of the people's bill of rights of dissemination of information. Those media entities that consistently show disdain or ignore the rights of people to accurate, positive and balanced news should be exposed and shunned. Possible sanctions, like exclusion from news conferences or depriving them of advertising dollars could be considered.

In the past, some media outlets have agreed with this and tried to report positive news and failed. The reason is that everyone did not follow suit because the public simply likes reading sensational articles. For this notion to work all media must follow the people's bill of rights of information dissemination. The public's primitive appetite for violence and depraved behavior is so ingrained that a universal broad change in reporting will be required to succeed.

Our work with Pave the Way Foundation seeks to eliminate, through positive gestures, sources of friction and obstacles between religions and to direct the religious leaders to work with the governments to end the use of religion to achieve private agendas. After all it is only the religious leaders can respond to religious zealots, the governments can only respond with violence. This tool of religion to justify war and violence has been used throughout history to cause almost every conflict on earth. For example, I have seen first hand how the Muslim community has repeatedly tried to speak out against those whose acts have defiled their religion through religiously illegal violent acts. Their public statements against violence do not get reported. As a result, the rest of the world keeps asking "why haven't the Muslims spoken up?" There are multiple examples of this kind of reporting and photo coverage some involve Israeli conflicts or the daily rocket attacks into Israel which remain unreported to this very day. Many reports are simply biased and photos have been doctored to sway the reading public in a desired direction.

For every reported act of violence or negativity, **billions** of positive actions remain unreported. Acts of volunteerism, kindness and charity noted across the globe are ignored by the news media. Positive stories will also sell papers because people feel good when they read of acts of kindness and goodwill. Some positive stories will go a long way towards improving our quality of life through volunteerism and by setting examples of how positive thinking and acts can change the course of history.

If we don't speak up and try to effect change, if we don't recognize this "loose cannon" in our lives, all of the trappings of wealth, which we seem to devote our lives to acquire, will be dust in a chain reaction of destruction that can be sparked by one atomic detonation. We need the media industry to be part of the solution rather than exacerbating the problem and to recognize that it has a moral obligation to become part of the team to work towards global peace.

As we all sing *Kumbaya* and other songs of peace, greet each other with *Shalom and Salaam* and pray for peace let us gather the courage to really diagnose the problem and take concrete steps to really achieve peace through action.

I close with a quote from Mark Twain "if you don't read the newspaper you are uninformed, if you do read the newspaper you are misinformed." My plea to the thinking public is to wake up and let your voices be heard "I want you to go to your window, and throw it open and say I'm as mad as hell and I'm not going to take it anymore." Let's do it! Visit us at www.ptwf.org

About Pave the Way Foundation

PTWF is dedicated to achieving peace by bridging "the intellectual gap" in tolerance and understanding, by enhancing relations between religions through cultural, technological and intellectual gestures. The Foundation has a simple yet monumental vision: To enable all the world's religions to mutually realize that extremism, politics and personal agendas must not be allowed to poison the true benevolent message common to all faiths. Bigotry and hatred must be abolished by the faithful embracing their similarities and savoring their differences.

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