

Journalist Tool Kit

Importance of Establishing a Caring Relationship with your Subject

Why is being a caring journalist necessary to create positive change?

As journalists, it is our responsibility to establish caring relationships with the people we encounter and to bring awareness to the topics we cover. By educating the public about issues around the world, we hope to bring action, activism, and positive change to the people and communities around us through care. As the age old saying goes, we must lead by example. Change begins with us. Feeling empathetic towards a story is not enough. Using our empathy and emotions compelled by the stories and people we encounter in order to take positive action is essential. In order to create a positive impact on the people and communities involved, we first need to create a caring relationship with our interviewees based on trust and then establish a connection that continues post-story. These valuable connections give us access to produce firsthand change. Immerse yourself in the experiences of the people you speak to. The issues we write about, photograph, and film should feel personal to us as well. Awareness is not enough. Change is.

Invasive vs. Immersive

It is essential for journalists to immerse themselves in the stories they are covering. Through immersion, they can take on the experience and emotions of interviewees to better understand the story and become a caring journalist. While journalists try to accomplish immersing themselves in the story, avoid overly invasive tactics. Here is the difference between being an invasive journalist versus being an immersive journalist:

Invasive:

- Forcing answers out of subjects
- Not respecting personal and mental space
- Disruptive
- Demeaning
- Asking coercive questions
- Do not abuse trust to wrongly exploit subjects

Immersive:

- Educate yourself on the topic beforehand, but do not create preconceived notions
- Take on the experience and emotions of subjects
- Be a listening ear
- Be mentally present
- Body language that shows you are involved in the conversation / story
- Giving the subjects the freedom to answer truthfully, without judgment

Key Ways to Develop Care with Subjects

1

Assess the situation beforehand in order to understand how to communicate with interviewees - Every situation and person a journalist encounters is unique. Journalists should have a firm understanding of whom they are talking to, what the situation is, and how to approach the interviewee/situation beforehand.

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Be a friend, not a superior - Creating a mutual platform for sharing and listening makes it easier for interviewees to open up about their experiences and share their truth.

2

Always be aware of when you are on the record or off the record - It is vital that both the journalist and the interviewee are clear about when they are on or off of the record. This is a caring tactic that enhances trust between the interviewee and the journalist.

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Follow up post story - Keep in contact even after the story is finished. Continue developing the relationship. This could lead journalists to new happenings and a follow-up story.

3

Don't judge - Create an open and accepting environment to allow people to communicate honestly with you as a journalist. Interviewees have to feel they can be honest with the journalist or the journalist may not receive the full truth of the story.

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Make lasting connections - By creating a trusting relationship and following up post-story, journalists can continue to make positive change in the lives and communities of their interviewees.

4

Respect - Mutual respect is needed in all relationships. Respect your interviewee in order to receive the same in return. This allows a mutual relationship to develop in which the interviewees view the journalist as a trusting listener instead of a superior interrogator.

5

Trust - Without trust, there is no true relationship. Trust allows the interviewee to give journalists the story in full honesty. Journalists hold a lot of power and it is important for interviewees to trust they are putting their story into the right hands.

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Empathy - Empathy is a sign that the journalist understands the story and the experiences of the interviewee.



“How do I Care?”

When it comes to reporting, it is necessary to make sure that the journalistic practice is oriented to caring, in order to avoid invasive tactics and distrust between the journalist and interviewee. Here are some questions to test your caring ability in real life situations (calculate your score to see your results below):

You are interviewing a child in an at-risk community about local violence. After the story you should:

0: Publish an article to spread awareness about innocent at-risk children and hope someone will take action

1: Publish your article and keep in contact with the child to be a positive and motivational influence in their life. Keep a line of communication open so the child can stay in touch with you.

You are talking to a victim of sexual assault about her experience. What kind of question is of the caring type and not invading sensitive boundaries?

0: Were you suicidal after the incident?

1: How has this experience changed you? What has helped you get through this?

You are visiting a neighborhood in order to report how a hurricane destroyed thousands of houses. How do you approach the families affected?

0: Talk directly to the victims, entering their homes without any explanation of what is your duty and main goal in there.

1: Spend some reasonable time speaking with the people and trying to know them before asking for hard and deep information.

You are interviewing someone who has recently lost a family member, how do you approach this interview?

0: You immediately ask how their family member had died and how they are feeling about it.

1: You take the time and let them tell you their story, express your condolences and offer support.

You have to interview a politician that was supposed to be involved in a corruption case. How do you face the encounter?

0: You make sure of being informed enough over the topic and the case before approaching the interview. Also, having talk with other people with different opinions than the politician.

1: You arrive to the interview with a prejudice over the interviewee and not understanding completely what the case is about.

Total: _____

Scoring Guide:

0-1 – You mostly *care about* other people and issues presented to you. This is not necessarily a bad thing, but also not necessarily the most impactful either.

2-3 – You are right in the middle of the spectrum **between caring for and caring about** other people and issues presented to you.

4-5 – You tend to *care for* other people and issues presented to you. This type of caring is action-oriented, and more likely to elicit change.