

# Demystifying the media



**Philip  
Dine**

**W**e all agree by this point, or so I hope, how important it is to get the message out.

But doing so can seem downright daunting. How do you influence those mega news corporations, those chain-owned newspapers, those vast radio and TV networks? How do you reason with the ideologues? What does it take to get beyond the conventional wisdom with busy reporters or ivory tower editorial writers at the local paper?

Well, the first step is to remember a few simple notions that will serve you well as you deal with journalists—especially at the community or regional levels where you’ll typically interact with the media.

They’re just people, working people at that, doing their jobs as best they can, hoping to please—or avoid—their often-quarrelsome bosses, trying to get through the day. (Can anyone relate?)

Most don’t have an agenda—they just want to find a good story that’ll gain them some public recognition and some pats on the back within the newsroom. (We can provide the content.)

And some, at least on their best days, hope to make a difference—improve life in their community or in society as a whole, maybe win one of those sought-after journalism prizes in the process. (We can tap into that idealism.)

What does this mean for us? It means this: Lose any trepidation, any concerns about journalists conspiring to do us in, any worries of inevitable confrontation. You are, after all, dealing with people who generally are well-intentioned, also sometimes bumbling or even clueless—all in all, sort of regular folks.

Whether you’re being interviewed for a story, trying to persuade an editorial page editor to consider a commentary piece, or prodding a reporter to examine the impact that ending Saturday or door delivery would have on residents and businesses, focus on the three E’s:

- **Enlist their help.** Perhaps you’re seeking to lend perspective that too often is left out of news stories and you need Mr. Reporter to help the reader or viewer get the whole picture; or maybe you want to respond to a misleading article or op-ed and you need Ms. Editorial Page Editor to give you the space. Either way, you don’t have to win an argument on the issues with them; you simply want them to help get across useful information to the public (which is, after all, what they signed up to do). Presented this way, it’s not difficult to get them on your side.

- **Educate them.** As you offer your information, you’ll inform and influence their work well beyond your interaction with them. Your credibility, and impact, will rise if you toss in comments like these—“You don’t have to believe me; you can Google this in five minutes” or “As the *Wall Street Journal* and Associated Press have reported” or “These aren’t our figures; they’re from official Postal Service documents.”
- **Entice them.** Let them know what’s in it for them—they can demolish the conventional wisdom, shed light on a matter of interest to virtually all local residents and business owners, and raise issues that folks can do something about (by explaining that the postal financial crunch isn’t about technological progress but rather flawed public policy). That’s a trifecta for a journalist.

Briefly put: Relish the process as you continue changing the national conversation. As so many of you already have proven, you’re more than up to the task. And, as always, let me know if you want any help.

**There was no letdown in your efforts on this score over the past month.** A few highlights: Scott Dulas, president of Duluth, MN Branch 114, alerted us to an opportunity to get the message out as residents and civic leaders fought to maintain quality mail service. That led to a powerful op-ed in the *Duluth News Tribune* by President Rolando—and an accompanying positive editorial along with a good cartoon. (Talk about a trifecta.) He also had commentaries elsewhere, including the *Arizona Republic* and *Belleville News-Democrat*.

Perhaps most significant was President Rolando’s rapid response to the ambitious effort by a Virginia-based free-market think tank to spark resentment in small-town America by casting urban areas as the villain for allegedly getting improved postal services at the Heartland’s expense. Our president demolished both such pieces (in the *Kansas City Star* and Maine’s *Bangor Daily News*) with commentaries showing how all regions and populations are in this fight together—commentaries that drew more reader attention than the offending articles. Result: The fledgling divide-and-conquer effort quickly abated.

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