

Journalists can't juggle



**Philip
Dine**

This is a busy time for journalists and the media outlets that employ them. That goes for any election season, particularly when the highest office in the land is at stake. But the one we're in now, of course, isn't just any presidential race. It's already the strangest and most unpredictable election in a long time, and that'll only intensify for the five months until voters go to the polls, and probably for some time thereafter.

It's the type of period that drives a perpetually harried profession to the brink of frenzy.

Now, you'd think that journalists could juggle a few balls at a time. But then again, you also might think that journalists could do basic math, since

numbers often appear in their stories, but if they could, there wouldn't be the old joke about the warning sign spotted in a newsroom—"Danger, journalist doing math."

So, no, reporters don't juggle stories well, and their supervisors—editors, assignment editors, producers—are even more easily overwhelmed and prone to becoming one-note Charlies when a major news event—a war, an election, a scandal—occurs. (Secret: It's an unwritten rule in journalism that incompetent folks get promoted, to get them off the street and safely behind a desk to avert the damage they did when actually reporting the news.) And since things tend to flow downward in a newsroom, with the overall atmosphere reflecting the outlook at the top, the whole place quickly gets preoccupied with that one dominant story.

We need to be cognizant of this, because for the rest of the year our communications efforts will be a little more challenging, in more ways than one. It'll take longer to get our voices in the media, including through letters to the editor or commentary pieces, because journalists will be distracted. It'll also be harder, because competition for the available space will be stiffer.

As a result, we need to do several things a little differently; here are the three most important:

- **Plan further in advance, especially if the topic is time-sensitive**—This allows more time for the item to get noticed by an editor, then to get a response, and finally until it ultimately runs.
- **Make our submissions or story suggestions even more compelling**—This is because we'll encounter journalists focused on the election, and because media outlets will set aside much news and commentary space or air time for matters political. So what we say or pro-

pose has to be gripping to capture their attention, and clear so it's readily understandable with little effort.

- **Consider alternate media outlets so we have back-up options**—These could be smaller newspapers, weekly papers, business journals or non-network broadcast stations. And even with those alternatives, remember that Points 1 and 2 above still apply.

As always, please let me know if you'd like to discuss any of this.

Navigating this successfully is all the more important because while the media will be narrowly focused on the election, we have a broad array of key matters before us—the legislative front, the rates issue, collective bargaining and our own political/electoral activity, several of which will involve media/public outreach.

We saw a microcosm of all this when the Postal Service released its financial report for Fiscal Year 2016's second quarter on May 10. The Associated Press Washington Bureau was deluged with Trump news, as an editor put it, and not only couldn't discuss the USPS report but eventually passed on coverage of it, as did *The Washington Post* and *The New York Times*. But as it turned out, an editor at *The Hill* was interested and, though the publication's postal reporter was (naturally) assigned to a political story, the fill-in reporter did a superb job weaving together the finances, the contours of a possible legislative reform package and more—all the more helpful given *The Hill's* huge readership on Capitol Hill.

Several other media outlets, both print and broadcast, also did thorough and nuanced reports. As usual, NALC was, along with USPS, the dominant player in the coverage.

The major reason for the constructive coverage, and for the prominence of NALC's voice, was that President Rolando commented in ways that helped make clear the various elements in play this time around—the normal quarterly report, the rate issue, the legislative efforts and the growing consensus among stakeholders—and how they tied together.

At a time when media outlets are preoccupied with politics and when postal issues are growing more multifaceted, he provided clarity and perspective. The result was solid—and helpful—reporting to the American public.

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