

THE DAY PLANNER

A journalist is plagued by an obsession: what's new? He's hungry for news that he can share with the world. He needs to know what's going on, so he can tell others about it. But his mission as a truth bringer forces him to separate actual news and irrelevant, or worse, untrue ones. He manages to do so thanks to an inventory of truthful, accountable news he writes up on his day planner.

A WELL ORGANIZED DAY PLANNER = A QUALITY NEWSPAPER

The quality content in a newspaper is proportional to the day planner's. A serious planner is divided in three schedules:

Hot news: a daily list of what's happening today and that's been announced by trusted sources. It helps prepare your copy. For example: tomorrow I'm planning 1 & ½ column for a recap of the President's speech that'll take place this afternoon.

Coming next: things to do so as to organize how the news will be covered over the days, weeks, or months to come. It helps anticipate. For example: I need to schedule meetings to assess current public discontentment before the anniversary of the civil strife from last year.

Selected stories: high added value, personal topics. This schedule helps you plan stories built to add side-information to bigger stories, or that go against the tide. For example: the news is depressing... I'm going to interview the local baker; he's always so funny.

WHEN WORKING IN TEAM, IT'S BETTER TO USE A COLLECTIVE DAY PLANNER.

Five windows to open every day:

The first daily gesture of a news finder: opening the windows through which you can see the news fields.

There are five natural windows: the radio, the TV, the Internet, the press... and your local bar.

You get in touch with the news by listening to the radio, watching television, browsing the web, reading the freshest news, and keeping your ears open in the nearest café or when you're at the bakery. Therefore... get up early!

Such daily discipline allows of r:

- Updating the planner with other media's forecasts.
- Evaluating your own production: you compare it to that of your fellow journalists. It will help you avoid the deadly sin of self-congratulation.

THE MORGUE, DOCUMENTS = ADDED VALUE

(For a newspaper, the morgue is not the place where you store the dead bodies, rather past editions).

If you want to improve your work performance, your second daily gesture should be: piling up information from other media. Comparing my production to that of others brings me knowledge on the topics I have to cover. The more well documented you are, the better your story will be.

A pair of scissors is enough, every day, to pick, choose, and archive the clippings. The sum of these clippings classed in chronological order or thematically, brings you the added comfort of a personal library... something which quite helps on your quest for added value.

CAREFUL! IT'S A TRAP!

The day planner is not a holy book. It never sums up EVERYTHING that's going on. You'll get trapped if you submit to the law of planning's ruled by PRs.

SOMETHING TO PONDER

Once I've thought about the different ways to turn my daily budget into actual stories, I need to ask myself one last, crucial question : what else can I do, what can I improve so that my newspaper's content is more relevant, more informative than rival newspapers ?

THE NEWSROOM MEETINGS

A newspaper is the result of collective work. During the meeting, the newsroom discusses the global production. Such a discussion has three goals: planning the newspaper's contents; organizing production; analyzing the content to see what can be improved. A newsroom meeting is useful for any and every type of newspaper, however often it's published.

THERE ARE THREE TYPES OF NEWSROOM MEETINGS:

1. One plans how the news will be covered. Its goal: determining the content of the newspaper published the following day. In a nutshell: how the stories will be covered. As such, the journalists build a provisional budget for each page: how many articles, what kind of articles, their lengths, hierarchy, illustrations... In a word, they build the skeleton of the paper. An example for a six-column page: 1 report from X... (3 col.); 1 debate recap + 1 opinion piece by Y... (2 col.); 4 small news items (1 col.).
2. Another organizes how the news will be covered. The writers meet each morning to organize the content of the newspaper published the following day. They each pick their tasks for the day so as to create a "general budget" that will become the "finalized budget": list of articles, type of articles, author's names, and obligatory length...

Example of a “finalized budget” for a 6 columns page: 1 report from X (Text 2 col $\frac{1}{4}$ + Photo $\frac{3}{4}$); 1 debate summary (1col $\frac{1}{2}$) + 1 opinion piece by Y... ($\frac{1}{2}$ col.); 4 small news items: Justice, Police, Budget, and Economics (1 col.).

3. A third one is a general reflection on news coverage. Journalists meet up regularly – for example once a semester or a trimester – to review together, with a critical eye, what they’ve collectively produced over the last few months. Together they decide on the best way to cover the news to come, and make editorial choices. The meeting becomes a newsroom committee. The newspaper’s director, the editor in chief, can call it with a very precise order of the day.

Example:

- a. *“The Arab Spring”: our coverage in review*
- b. *getting ready for the local elections*
- c. *should the newspaper take a stance in the upcoming presidential race?*

STANDING UP

Making a newspaper every day is running against the clock every day. To gain some time, journalists stand up when the newsroom meeting finalizes news coverage’s planned overnight. Why? Because it’s the easiest way to make sure the meeting doesn’t last too long.

SITTING DOWN

You meet seated if you have time for discussion. Such is the case when the newsroom forecasts its production for a day to another, or a week to another, or when the meeting becomes a committee.

EXAMPLE: FOR A NEWSROOM DIVIDED IN SECTIONS.

9.30. Section meetings. All journalists must attend. Attendees stand up. Everyone, in agreement with their own planner, formulates their suggestions. Articles are

calibrated, that is to say they're given a precise amount of characters, words, columns, or pages – this must be respected. The section editor, taking into account the global planner, picks or rejects his coworkers' demands. He decides on the preliminary layout, the dummy.

Example for the political section :
 * Page 9 :

– *Analysis by A.R. of the President's electoral strategy: 2 cols w/ drawings by J.P.*

Opinion piece: dissension amongst the majority (R.B.) ½ col.

Summary of latest legislative session (L/Z.) 1 col.

Interview of the President of the Senate (A.G.) 1 cool ½

Various short news items: 1 col.

* Page 10 :

Story on the far-left's electoral campaign (A.C.) 2 cool w/ 1 photo by R.D.

Portrait of the candidate for the Squirrels Liberation Front (A.B.)

1col ½ w/ photo by J.B.)

Women's vote analysis (J.G.) 1 cool ½

Short news items ½ col.

10 AM. Operational newsroom meeting presided by the newspaper's chairman or the newsroom chief editor. All sections must be represented. Participants attend standing up. Every section brings forth their budget for the day. Discussion is limited to which stories will be put on the FrontPage, and to calibrating adjustments. The meeting should last no more than 20 minutes. A global budget is validated, becomes the finalized budget and is sent to the editors.

10.30. Each section integrates in its production decisions written in the general budget.

5.30. Each service writes up its pre-budget for the following day. Each writer states his forecast to the section editor, who in turn writes up an inventory of all forecasts and starts arbitrating.

6PM. Provisional meeting. Participants are seated. Each section must have a representative. Meeting open to

every writer. Each section presents its provisional budget. Roundtable : the general budget. Duration depends on the attendees' workload.

SELF-DISCIPLINE

Two recommendations for efficient newsroom meetings :

- Never forget that you're cleverer together than on your own.
- Don't mix up genres: only the newspaper's content is up for discussion. Other topics, such as conflicts, social issues, syndical issues... will be treated through other bodies.