

*Diener*

NEWSPAPER STAFF: GETTING AND KEEPING

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**NEWSPAPER STAFF:**

**GETTING AND KEEPING...**

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## NEWSPAPER STAFF: GETTING AND KEEPING

For many CUP papers the problem is not getting a staff, but keeping it. Throughout the years a number of methods have proven effective in getting people through the newspaper office door for the first time. Everything from mammoth posters to newspaper ads, to ads on university radios, to booths selling magazines in the halls to free beer have all been effective in getting new staffers out.

Most new staffers don't last too long however, as newspaper offices tend to be busy places where the people don't always have time to pass on their expertise or information.

The following article from Editor and Publisher magazine seems to provide a structure that would make it easier for a new person to fit more easily into a smaller working group from which he could learn and to which he could relate.

Some people unfortunately consider any sort of structure "undemocratic." Completely unstructured papers can work if the entire staff is knowledgeable and the operation is small enough. But in most cases very little knowledge is passed on to a new staff in this situation and when the old staff leaves the paper is in trouble.

A working structure does not undercut staff democracy, but rather increases it as more of the staff can come become involved intelligently in the paper in less time. With greater involvement and a sense of place on the paper, staffers are less likely to tolerate autocratic decisions by an editor.

Hankins paper suggests one member of the group would "direct" the groups activities but this would not have to be the case. In a group of this size all members would have far more impact in democratic decision making than could be true in a large staff meeting.

The sort of small groups described by Hankins paper also guarantees some continuity in the paper since when a new staffer begins work in one of the groups he will be able to work directly with people who have been covering the subject for some time.

It also avoids the problem of alienation many writers feel when they are stuck by themselves on a small beat without much interaction with a larger group.

### RENING THE NEWSROOM ON A MODULE SYSTEM

By Bill Hankins, City Editor,  
Dallas Times-Herald

It became apparent several years ago the familiar beat system most newspapers had used could no longer cope with the changing needs of news gathering.

News beats were developing faster than newspapers were adding reporters. Among those added in the last few years were ecology, consumerism, energy, minority affairs, etc.

The beats also developed overlaps which oftentimes were confusing and unworkable.

To compensate, newspapers began to turn more and more to the team approach--assigning a group of reporters to a coverage area. While proving satisfactory in some areas, team reporting created problems in communication; in controlled and even copy flow, and in wasted man hours.

Realizing those problems existed, the Times Herald created still another system--utilizing the good qualities of both beat and team reporting.

We divide reporters into groups similar to the team approach. The difference is that certain members in the module maintain permanent beats, while others rove from beat to beat as determined by the news activity.



One module--government--has six reporters and a module leader who directs the group's day-to-day activities (he's a working reporter himself). The permanently staffed beats are City Hall, county courthouse, federal beat and education administration. Two other reporters and the team leader rove--going where the news flow is the heaviest.

The benefits are these: A reporter is not necessarily locked in on a day in which the beat is dead while other reporters are over extended because their beats are especially heavy.

The rovers are familiar with each beat and its news sources, and can step in without coverage gaps during vacations.

Because the rovers are available, the regular beat reporters in a module can step out of the day-to-day routines from time to time and do research and depth items.

The module leader can in an urgent situation station himself in the office to expedite a called-in breaking news event from reporters within his module.

It helps build future beat people from the rovers and help build leadership qualities in the module leader.

It adds one side effect in competitive situations. When a beat reporter from an opposition paper has a heavy day keeping up with breaking news, it is a psychological blow to find three reporters from a module covering the same ground.

The modules are organized to back each other or to intermingle when the need arises.

The Times Herald has six modules: government, spot news, news team II, metropolitan, special assignments and rewrite. Each has a particular function as a team. For instance: Should a crisis develop requiring immediate action by several reporters, the six-man spot-news module is dispersed to do the leg work, while news team II would provide a desk man to each man in the field.

If still more reporters are required, the special-assignments module would be called next, then metropolitan and then the government module.

Each module has a book of guidelines to follow in such instances, and a set function to perform.

One of the module system's advantages is saturation coverage.

That involves news team II, which one day a month moves its six reporters into City Hall assigned to major department heads. Each reporter will spend several hours picking the mind of the department head for information and story ideas and looking at how his department functions. From this, the reporter will do any spot news stories, then file a report with several further story ideas about the department he studied. All this has been done while the regular City Hall reporter is working his normal beat.

The saturation team's reports and the story ideas are taken by the city editor, then turned over to the government team leader for follow-up.

News team II's saturation coverage then turns to the county courthouse one day each month on a regular basis, the school beat one day a month and the federal beat one day every three months.

This keeps ideas generating. It makes the sources on the beat aware the newspaper is interested, and gives both the saturation team and the regular beat reporters a better idea of what's happening around them.

Another highly successful use of the module system is this: We take six good ideas on the City Hall beat and assign one each to the saturation team reporters for six quick stories in addition to what the regular beat reporter is picking up.

The beat method used in modules is not necessarily the traditional beat system under which the reporter is responsible for doing every story on that beat. Under the module system, the "beat" person is a monitor of that area of coverage. It is his responsibility to recommend to the city editor coverage of what he sees happening on that beat. This allows the city editor to assign coverage of stories the beat reporter might put aside because he doesn't have time to them.

In this aspect, the module system eliminates jealousies that used to arise when one reporter crossed another's beat to get a good story.

Communication is the key to sound operation in any area. The modules stimulate that communications and the growth of ideas. For us, it is a highly workable system.