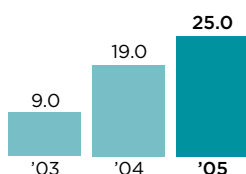




AJC reporter Jane O. Hansen's 22-part series about Hurricane Katrina could be downloaded to an iPod, read on ajc.com or in the newspaper.

AVERAGE TRAINING HOURS PER EMPLOYEE: 278% Increase



SUCCESS STORY

The Atlanta Journal-Constitution: Aligning Learning Strategy with Specific Goals Makes a Great News Organization Even Greater

RESULTS

The Atlanta Journal-Constitution made major improvements in news content by setting clear objectives for the newsroom and creating a dynamic training program to help the staff meet the goals.

AJC devoted a total of nearly 12,000 staff hours to training in 2005, an average of 25 hours per staff member. The newspaper measured these gains:

- **Alternative story forms.** The newspaper wanted to shift from a traditional news writing style to storytelling with visuals and approaches that were more likely to engage readers. After a year of training, the traditional style no longer dominated Page One and other section fronts. Before training started, only a third of all Page One stories used alternative story forms. After one year, nearly 60 percent used non-traditional forms.
- **Beat watchdog stories.** AJC wanted government beat reporters to produce more enterprise stories based on public documents. After intensive training, the newspaper produced 95 such stories in 2005, more than double the number a year earlier.
- **Culture.** The newsroom focused on improving communications and culture through its training programs and began moving from a change-resistant culture, typical in the news industry, to a more adaptive one that can better meet the demands of consumers in the new media marketplace.

These gains provide a foundation for training in 2006 designed to bring more contributions from the print staff to AJC.com, the organization's burgeoning Web site.



FROM NEWS, IMPROVED:

"I expected some jaded responses, but everybody was pretty optimistic. People were eager. They seemed hungry for training."

— Local government reporter Ty Tagami



TOP: Editorial page columnist Jim Wooten participates in a commuting blog.

BOTTOM: from left, Managing Editor Hank Klibanoff, Editor Julia Wallace and Managing Editor James Mallory.



A PLAN OF ACTION

The Atlanta Journal-Constitution is the leading source of news, information and advertising for the Atlanta metropolitan area. When representatives of Tomorrow's Workforce visited the newsroom in 2004, signs of a major transition were evident. The paper had a new editor, several new senior executives, and a growing Web presence.

The paper aspired to become more authoritative and engaging, to improve its investigative efforts and increase its appeal to a highly diverse audience. AJC.com was building an audience and wanted more contributions from the print-oriented staff.

AJC used Tomorrow's Workforce as a launching pad to increase training and link it more clearly to news and business goals. A TW team spent three days in the AJC newsroom, interviewing dozens of staff members and attending news meetings. The team reviewed readership and market research and conducted a survey of the newsroom and a content analysis of the newspaper. During this process, the team also encouraged the staff to think about the purpose of their training and the results they wanted to achieve in their news content as a result of training.

The following recommendations emerged:

- Newsroom leaders should consider the clarity and consistency of their message to the staff and evaluate newsroom practices and styles of leadership that might be undermining their message.
- Mid-level editors required additional craft skills, as well as management training including coaching and conflict resolution.
- A training committee composed of staff should be created to explore the leadership goals and develop a training program.

A breakthrough occurred during a session with a dozen top AJC editors. The group asked: What would make this paper better? From the resulting list of ideas, the editors chose three as the pillars of their program for the year: beat watchdog reporting, versatility in storytelling and story form, and community connections. The group also decided it would lay a foundation for training in multi-media journalism for their Web presence and intensify that training in the following year.

“When a story breaks, there is pretty easy communication between departments about how we are going to get this done.”

— Editor Julia Wallace

Training director Sheila Garland recruited a staff committee that would help move those ideas from whiteboard to reality. The members of the training committee took their newsroom colleagues out for working meals to answer the question: If you could have any type of training you want, what would it be? They interviewed several dozen staffers from across the newsroom. Over a couple of intense months they learned what kind of learning atmosphere the news staff wanted.

The reactions surprised committee members. People were optimistic and eager. There was a nearly universal desire for more training.

One key idea was to have reporters and editors participate together in training to improve communication among them. The staff also wanted training that would help them produce one- or two-day stories rather than long projects. They wanted trainers known for turning around good stories on deadline. And, to ensure, as one committee member put it, that the managers “reward workhorses as well as racehorses,” the committee proposed that every staff member be required to participate in a minimum number of hours of training every year. Later, the newsroom adopted a 20-hour minimum for staff and a 30-hour minimum for managers.

The committee developed a yearlong curriculum of 85 training opportunities ranging from core classes, four-day skill sessions, lectures from industry trainers, to bus tours and readership surveys. It also created a futures file including ideas such as more widespread Spanish-language training and creation of an interactive database of staffers’ knowledge that reporters could access.

AJC staff members can now earn credit to meet their required training hours by either attending a workshop or teaching one. The greatest challenge has been maintaining high quality training while drawing heavily on staff members to teach.

Participants in the Tomorrow’s Workforce project saw that developing the newsroom university was part of the learning experience. Staff members gained valuable insight into communication skills, organizational dynamics, the need for mutual respect, the power of goal setting, and the need for teamwork – all critical to the success of any enterprise.

“Training is the way to get a better newsroom and a better newspaper.”

— Editor
Julia Wallace



More than 100 copy editors attended “Headlines That Matter – and How to Write Them,” led by Alex Cruden of the Detroit Free Press. The AJC worked with copy editors across the region to host the daylong workshop.



JUST THE FACTS:

Newspaper:

***The Atlanta (GA)
Journal Constitution***

Daily Circulation (M-F):
350,157*

Number of Employees:
467

Ownership:
Cox Newspapers, Inc.

URL:
www.ajc.com

* Audit Bureau of Circulations
(Total Avg Paid Circ.) 9/30/06

**NEWS, IMPROVED: HOW AMERICA'S NEWSROOMS
ARE LEARNING TO CHANGE**

As news organizations adapt to a changing media landscape, strategic learning is critical for organizations that want to increase their audiences and maintain journalistic quality. *News, Improved: How America's Newsrooms Are Learning to Change* looks at research and development from \$10 million in training projects sponsored by the John S. and James L. Knight Foundation to show how leadership, goal-setting and staff development improve the culture of the newsroom and the content of the news product – both key drivers of audience appeal. Learn how American newsrooms are becoming more adaptive and creative, fueled by continuous, strategic training.

TOMORROW'S WORKFORCE

With support from more than 50 journalism organizations, the John S. and James L. Knight Foundation created Tomorrow's Workforce in 2003 to demonstrate how investments in training and professional development for mid-career journalists can improve the quality and appeal of journalism. Working with 17 newspapers, the project has developed a strategic approach to training that has helped newsrooms train more effectively and document the impact of training.

KNIGHT FOUNDATION

The John S. and James L. Knight Foundation promotes excellence in journalism worldwide and invests in the communities where the Knight brothers ran newspapers. Learn more about the Knight Foundation at www.knightfdn.org.



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