



Allison Pollan,
city editor, at a
news meeting.

SUCCESS STORY

Corpus Christi Caller-Times: Newspaper Training Improves Teamwork, Grows Circulation

RESULTS

When Vice President Dick Cheney accidentally shot a fellow hunter on a Texas ranch in February 2006, the local Corpus Christi Caller-Times broke the story on-line and made national headlines.

Understandably, staff members of the 51,700-circulation newspaper on the Gulf coast congratulated themselves for beating the national news media to the story. Surprisingly, they credited a training program. The Cheney story brought home how much their participation in culture-change training and activities with the Knight-funded Learning Newsroom project had ignited their initiative and strengthened their teamwork.

Training has been an integral part of the Caller-Times aggressive push into online and the growth of its print circulation.

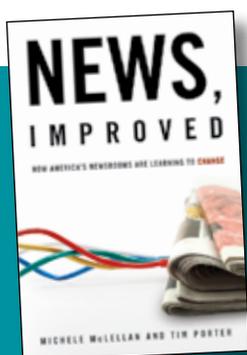
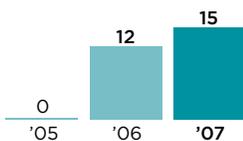
“I think it’s so clear that if we stand still, our industry really will die. We have to change. We can’t expect our employees and our staff to grow and change if we are not willing to invest in them,” Editor Libby Averyt said.

Results include:

- A more adaptive and innovative newsroom culture.
- Increased daily and Sunday circulation
- Web innovation that has contributed to significant audience growth.
- A requirement that each staff member participate in at least 15 hours of training per year.

Key to the Caller-Times success is a vibrant staff committee that promotes newsroom learning and initiative. The committee “helps create an atmosphere where growing is just expected. If you’re in our newsroom and you’re standing still, you’re not going to be successful here,” Averyt said.

TRAINING HOURS REQUIRED
PER EMPLOYEE:



FROM NEWS, IMPROVED:

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— Editor Libby Averyt


Online growth, Fall 2005 – Fall 2006:

Page views	4,400,000	up 19%
Unique visitors	up 117,823	up 60%
Registered users	224,233	up 38%

MOVING FORWARD

When Libby Averyt became editor of the Caller-Times in 2003, she wanted a newsroom staff that routinely seized initiative instead of waiting for word from the top.

Averyt turned to the Learning Newsroom, and the project became a catalyst for learning and change. “The Learning Newsroom gave us the tools to turn this into the kind of newsroom where we wanted to work.”

Averyt and her 70-person staff participated in Learning Newsroom training sessions aimed at improving newsroom culture – “management training for everyone” in areas such as communication, business literacy and innovation. And the newsroom increased its commitment to staff training in more traditional skills and new media significantly.

“Before this was very scattershot,” Averyt said. “It was sort of expected that if you had your own initiative to get some training that was great. And if you were lucky the paper would pay for it once in a while. It was always part of our evaluation process but it wasn’t something we talked about routinely. It wasn’t something that was just part of our daily lives around here.”

The newsroom started by requiring that each staff member participate in at least 12 hours of training per year. In 2007, the requirement increased to 15 hours. That was the staff’s idea, said Managing Editor Shane Fitzgerald.

The Cheney story brought home how much the newsroom had changed as a result of the Learning Newsroom project, staff members said. And the work is continuing.

In 2006, Caller-Times journalists busily working on content aimed at teenagers and young adults online and in print. The staff recruited a youth advisory board and gave members free subscriptions for six months in

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exchange for critiquing the newspaper. “When you’re in a newsroom you get tunnel vision,” said Michelle Christenson Parker, a photographer and member of the staff committee. “We have to step out of ourselves and really find out what people are interested in instead of assuming we know. In the past it’s been about us and not about them.”

They also were hard at work on improving communications. A new system corrects errors online more quickly. Another encourages online editors to meet individually with reporters to establish online goals for each. Editors were trained on time management and how to have effective meetings. It really helped, Parker said, when staff members took the Myers-Briggs Type Inventory, which measures personality type, and posted their results. “Everybody doesn’t talk about things the same way or like to be talked to in the same way. You start to realize why you have a hard time communicating with someone. We’re not butting heads, we just have a different style of communication. It makes you think more about how you deliver messages and talk about things to have the most effective communication.”

The change showed up in results of a culture survey of the staff – between 2004 and 2006, the newsroom moved away from defensive behaviors that are characteristic of the newspaper industry and became more constructive.

Averyt, who has worked at the newspaper for 20 years, said implementing change and increasing training have had their challenges. “There have been a few folks we’ve had to convince that this isn’t just the latest fad.”

“You really do have to have the commitment, to be diligent about it ... After you do it for several months, it takes on a life of its own. Now it’s part of who we are.”

Her advice to other editors: “You have to be open about yourself and your own shortcomings, if you will. You have to be willing to ask and listen to other people’s opinions and realize that you don’t have all the answers. And you have to be open to change, both within yourself and within your organization.”

The bottom line? “A newsroom where the staff members are not growing ... is a newsroom that is not going to go anywhere.”

“More ideas are coming to the table. People are more interested and trying to get involved. We push people to get involved.”

— Michelle Christenson Parker, staff photographer and a member of the newsroom staff committee



TOP: Kimiko Fieg, designer, and James Sanchez, photo editor, discuss news coverage.

BOTTOM: Sunday Editor Jen Meehan at her work station.



JUST THE FACTS:

Newspaper:

Corpus Christi Caller-Times

Daily Circulation (M-F):

51,743

Number of Employees:

70

Ownership:

Scripps

URL:

www.caller.com

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.

THE LEARNING NEWSROOM

The Learning Newsroom, sponsored by the American Society of Newspaper Editors and the American Press Institute, received a grant of \$1 million in 2003 to work with 10 print newsrooms. Through an intensive one-year program of training and facilitation of committee work, the project demonstrated how training could improve newsroom culture, which has been shown to be a key driver of innovation and greater audience appeal. Learn more about the project at www.learningnewsroom.org.

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.

