



STAR BULLETIN #5

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A Paper in Peril

- Plea to shareholders
- Questionable decisions
- Trust evaporates
- Quality vs. "good enough"

Torstar annual meeting

Guild executives and activists took your rising alarm at Star management's stewardship of our newspaper to Torstar shareholders and directors today. We attended Torstar Corp.'s annual meeting to raise your concerns about business decisions that risk weakening the precious Star brand, are pounding staff morale and have damaged the quality of our paper. We urged shareholders and directors to call top company managers to account, to demand that Torstar's flagship, Toronto's community trust and the Atkinson Principles be protected.

Wise, steady leadership needed

We all know our industry faces major challenges. We know you are prepared to face that challenge with a willingness to change and a deep commitment to the Star, as you demonstrated in our new contract. But big management decisions are disturbing. Why Torstar directors think CEO Rob Prichard's bonus last year deserved to be doubled to nearly \$1.5 million – when we haven't had a raise above inflation since the 1980s – is a complete mystery. To highlight just a few of the questionable recent decisions under his watch:

- This month the Star stunned the advertising industry's top ad buyers by announcing it was abandoning the Audit Bureau of Circulation, the newspaper industry standard, for a less reputable Canadian alternative. The Globe and Canwest papers are staying with ABC. Ad buyers have been denouncing the Star move since, saying they will no longer be able to trust our numbers. This is helpful?
- Our clumsy introduction of modular advertising and sectional pricing has also damaged our relationship with advertisers. Just ask anybody in our frustrated advertising department what their year has been like so far.
- On the crucial digital front, we seem determined to turn much of the operational decision-making – and our work -- over to Torstar Digital and the sales group Olive Network. These outfits have damaged the Star's digital efforts and revenue, at our considerable expense.

You've brought many other questionable business decisions to our attention. We need smarter, calmer leadership at the very top.

Trust evaporates

We began this year by avoiding a ruinous strike through a new contract that included huge work changes in Pre-press and Editorial. We are already regretting some of those decisions, for senior Star management has broken faith with us on those contract terms across the board.

- In Editorial, the company claims that we gave it the right to assign freelance reporting and photography inside the GTA. This is so wrong. As we told you clearly at our ratification meeting, we outright refused to surrender your job security this way. Yet management is now busy assigning stories and photos – our work – to local freelancers every day. We've grieved this of course, among numerous grievances we've been forced to launch since bargaining. This base betrayal by senior management of our good-faith attempt to compromise for the sake of our paper's welfare is just the top of a long list of company actions that show contempt for you and your union.

- In both Editorial and Pre-Press, promised top-drawer training to handle massive job change and reorganization has so far been a mirage. In Pre-Press, for example, all we've seen so far is "peer-to-peer" training plans – hardly the comprehensive effort we were promised.
- In the past month, a dozen loyal Star employees in our digital production areas and Newspaper in Education units have been given layoff notices. These sad moves also mean a new burden of production work onto untrained, already stressed staff in Editorial, and can only damage our efforts to promote the newspaper habit with students. This is investing in our future?

Again, we could go on for pages about the many problems we are facing. Instead of seeing us as a valuable partner in meeting our paper's many challenges, senior management is treating your union – and your colleagues – as a burdensome commodity that can be ignored or attacked. There is no loyalty here, and these kind of running disputes only hurts our paper. We are bitterly disappointed at what has been happening.

"Good enough" is not good enough

Management is spending a ton of dough on consultants in Advertising (Mercer) and Editorial (Star Navigator). What a diverting use of so much time and serious money. We think cultural change begins at home, and at the top. Here's an alternative: Start respecting the online staff who know customer needs best. Stop managing from the top down. Recognize that the quality of our newspaper should be Job One, not the kind of "good enough" approach that employees agree is eroding the quality of our newspaper – for readers and advertisers. Lead our transition from print to print and digital with clarity and vision instead of confusion, secrecy and hocus.

This is the challenge we've issued to shareholders, directors and senior managers. We hope they're listening.

Maureen Dawson, unit chair

And the rest of your Guild stewards and executive