

January 11, 2008

One big Metroland

Contents

- ✘ Editorial the target
- ✘ Fewer people do everything
- ✘ Defending the real Star
- ✘ Jan. 16 strike vote

Newsroom under siege

Every loyal Star employee is a company target in this round of bargaining. But no group is being singled out for as much nasty business as the award-winning bunch in Editorial (well, Pre-Press has a case too, but we'll leave that for another day).

The agenda

We're not sure the company has missed any opportunity to try and diminish the newsroom. The bargaining agenda would radically damage what it means to be a journalist at our paper. Take a deep breath: Here's just a partial list of what the company still has on the bargaining table:

- Sunday pay: Gone. Period.
- Overtime: Double time gone.
- Overtime: Per-shift overtime gone. Instead we'd have weekly overtime, which means a 12-hour shift could be followed by several shorter shifts, so the company could avoid paying any overtime at all. And get this: The first 5 hours of overtime a week would be paid at straight time, not time and a half. You'd only get time and a half for hours beyond 40 hours a week.
- Schedules: Posted 2 weeks in advance, not 4. Penalty for changing shifts without notice cut to 1 hour's pay.
- Night shift premium: Would only apply to those scheduled to work past 8 p.m.
- Merit pay: The company would be able to reduce or eliminate existing merit pay.
- Two-ways: Removal of the 10% wage premium and company cars for reporter-photographers.
- New hires: No Star pension. Seniority would no longer determine the order of layoffs; skill sets would.

All of this stuff would apply to other departments too, as would many other attempted company takeaways. But the above hits Editorial wallets in particular. We're talking thousands of dollars in lost wages for many people. But wait, there's more ...

Jacks & Jills of all trades

The company also wants to reclassify (almost) everybody not in support roles into four new jobs. Here they are: Team Editor. Page Editor. Editor. Journalist.

- Team Editor we already know about, but would include all department deputies.
- Page Editor we already know about, but would include all section editors.
- Editor would be all copy editors.
- Journalist would be the new job title of everyone who "generates content" – everyone from editorial writers to photographers to reporters to columnists to all bureau chiefs.

Now, the company says nobody in an existing higher category — say editorial writer or columnist – will have to take a cut in base pay, or lose any future base wage gains.

But wait, there's worse to come ...



Everybody a 2-way, 3-way, 4-way

These new job classifications, including Team and Page Editor, will each get a new job description. And those job descriptions will say people should be able to do everything in both the print and digital world. So the new Journalist should be able to interview people and write stories; shoot video; shoot stills; record audio tape; produce Flash and other graphics ... on it goes. Same for the editing jobs: Those people are expected to be as fluent in the digital and other high-tech skill worlds as in print.

But no protection

As you should expect, we have told the company that people must be protected in their current jobs. A reporter must not be forced to take video or stills, for example. A photographer cannot be forced to do an interview, for example. The company has flatly refused. They say a year or two at most is all the protection time they'll give existing staff, before this new "jack of all trades, master of none" journalism world becomes reality.

But wait, there's more ...

Fewer jobs, too

- Freelance: All restrictions on freelance inside the GTA would vanish, putting the job security of photographers, reporters and others at immediate risk.

- Editors: We know the company wants to reduce the number of production staff: A new CCI tool called NewsGate, for example, will in a year allow any one editor at any Torstar newsroom, sitting at any one computer, to place the same story on different pages and websites for every Torstar newspaper — video, photo enhancement and graphics, too! The company says it has no plans at this time to use NewsGate or other such things to reduce staff — although Torstar "efficiency experts" and outside consultants who specialize in "business process re-engineering" are involved in NewsGate's implementation alone.

Even more ...

We haven't even told you yet about the nasty company plans on pensions, benefits and much else that impact every Star employee. Stayed tuned for our next bulletin.

The future Star

We believe in a future with — and of — a newspaper, both print and online, that continues to protect the precious Star brand by not preaching but actually doing excellent journalism. This is not the company vision. The company would diminish specialists and promote generalists — while paying less. This is the world of Canadian Press, the Toronto Sun ... and Metroland. We didn't come to Canada's No. 1 daily to be part of this.

Strike vote

Calling all members: Our strike vote meeting begins Wed. Jan. 16 at 5 p.m. at the Westin Harbour Castle, across the street from 1 Yonge.

Guild Bargaining Committee

Unit Chair: Maureen Dawson
Editorial: Dan Smith and Valerie Hauch (alternate)
Circulation: Steve Gjorkes and Jeff Bodrucky (alternate)
Finance: Cathie Nichols and Dawn Armstrong (alternate)
Advertising: Elizabeth Marzari and Dijana Maderic (alternate)
Thestar.com: Craig Wattie and Tony Camara (alternate)
Pre-Press: Lester Veszlenyi and Lorraine Wohlgemuth (alternate)