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<td><strong>Date</strong></td>
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Communication Education And The Needs Of Media

By

Haji Taib Ahmad
COMMUNICATION EDUCATION AND THE NEEDS OF MEDIA

Chairman, ladies and gentleman.

Competition to be market leader is always intense today among newspapers in Malaysia. Due to this, newspapers tend to excel to give the best of news to its readers.

As a result, newspaper pages has to be increased in order to provide more news and features. Newspaper pages too has become bright and breezy with colours and designs.

With this brief background may I now limit myself on the subject that we are given today - that is the need of media.

That we are here today demonstrate how strongly we feel about this topic and hopefully this gathering could provide some ideas as how to meet this need.

Of course the needs varies from one newspaper to another newspaper. I don't claim to represent the views of all newspapers in this country. As you are aware, there are newspaper companies of diverse standing in terms of business operations, that of languages, types of sizes - broad sheet or tabloid, weekly and daily or for that matter distributed in the morning or afternoon.

And since recently, it has been noticed that certain morning or weekly daily sell its newspapers on weekend or evening to its metropolitan readers.

However, I shall try to give some of my observations as close as possible to the need of newspapers.

What are our needs?

Here I shall confine to the needs of hiring manpower or precisely, journalist that includes reporters and sub-editors.

In the case of Utusan, we have 200 staff in the Editorial Department five years ago and today we have 400, all in all from trainee reporters to Editorial chief. 30 more is coming to Utusan this October.
This clearly shows that print media, notably newspaper provides good opportunities for would be journalist.

The need for additional manpower is caused by the increase of pages and the wider coverage extended by this Newspaper. More reporters are stationed in branch offices, the opening of new correspondent offices at home and abroad and the shift towards specialization in reporting called for more reporters.

New intakes are of diverse educational background. Some are secondary school leavers but more and more University graduates are employed.

In selecting new intakes, we prefer those with good command of languages and some experience in journalism or writing. Of course, Malay is the most required but good command of English is essential and some knowledge of other languages gives the candidate better chances than others.

These are few to mention among other things that we require in newspaper.

Are newspaper employer happy with the supply of candidates in the market today?

How do they measure up in their work?

Generally speaking, in the case of Utusan, we're happy. This is because we have better candidates as compared to ten years ago.

We have the choice to select locally trained or foreign trained candidates in journalism or other core disciplines.

But of course as the surge of demand of quality is unavoidable, we have our laments as to the qualities of these candidates.

Challenges of better presentation of news reports nowadays do not only come from rival newspaper but also from electronic media, notably television. We have to have reporters who can interpret news event fast and intelligently. And also we have to have reporters who can dig out informations from the sources and not just suffice to wait for what a source has to say.

Definitely this is an area where we have to stop and to give a hard look at it.
There is more to be done or to follow up to polish or refine this new intakes entering a new work place.

All these years they have been observed to be slow in newswriting, having limited general knowledge and an absence of working knowledge of English.

It is almost absurd that as a Malay newspaper, Utusan places much importance on English. Yes, it is important because it is the tool for gathering informations locally and from abroad.

More often than not, English is used in any International meeting, official and private functions in most places. Without good command of English, it is almost certain that a reporter will not be able to bring back any good news or to misquote or to misinterpret any discussions taking place.

Dependence on foreign news agency for international coverage force us to emphasize English for new intake as they too have to work on translation.

As to that of slowness in newswriting, it is suggested that institute of higher learning that offer journalism review the duration period of practical training for the students. Six months of internship in newspaper offices would be the most ideal minimum length of practical training.

From experience the first three months provides general exposure for a student to understand the general set up and the work practices of the organization he or she is undergoing training. And for the next three months, normally, a student will begin to gain self-confidence in going about gathering and writing news.

As practice today, most institutions of higher learning allow their students to undergo for a two-month practical training with the exceptions of MARA INSTITUTE OF TECHNOLOGY that provides four months training. And in some cases there are students that spend only a month or less than a month training.
In providing or fulfilling the needs of media, there should be frequent contact between educators and practitioners. There should be discussions between them on the progress of students undergoing training. More often than not this contact does not exist.

Equally sad too, practitioners more often than not were unable to provide attention to trainees. Most of the time trainees are let loose on their own and they were treated as normal staff journalist.

The time has come for both sides to review this training method with a view of lengthening the period and involving a designated practitioner to be mentor in the training process.

This may be a slight burden to newspaper management but it is worth endeavouring for the result would benefit both the employer and the trainee.

Likewise, institutions of higher learning should allow more experience and respected practitioner to give talks or become mentors to students in the campus.

Another avenue that may be worth trying is to encourage media owners or management to select their own candidates either from a new intake or experience journalist to ameliorate their professional status by attaining qualifications at institute of higher learning.

There has been tremendous improvement or input put up by institutes of higher learning for the last two decades in preparing for better candidates to work in mass media industry.

The draw-back that we have identified could be easily corrected if both party that is the educators and the practitioners have the will to work hand-in-hand in overcoming the problem. The problem that we have listed is not a complicated one and as I see it is the result of inadequate communication by both parties involve in the industry.

ENDS