

The Downward Spiral

A Peculiar Journal of Free Press Editorial Employees

Yes, Alvah, There Is A Santa— Overtime!

Downward Spiral Says "Give Yourself A Well-Deserved Raise"

The JOA has taken us on an emotional roller coaster ride the past 43 months.

And the last dip in the track was a low one indeed - a contract unworthy of the proud, hard working and loyal work force that continued to put out a quality product in the face of adversity and an unknown future.

Those who've worked at the Free Press through the 1980s, or longer, remember the sacrifices we were asked to make for the sake of winning an alleged newspaper war.

Well, we made them, again and again. But when Knight-Ridder hit the JOA jackpot, were we offered a fair contract to show our loyalty was appreciated? Or how about people hired in the last three years? Some have said they took the gamble to come here when promised they'd be brought up to snuff with pay scales of other papers the size of Detroit's when the JOA went through.

Feel like you've been kicked in the ass, too, rookies?

Our bosses, though, non-guild managers, participate in a management by objectives program, or MBO, by which they receive a percentage of their base salary for successfully completing stated goals by specified dates.

Almost every MBO plan includes the goal of staying within budget, which in turn means keeping overtime to a minimum. If you've ever wondered why a boss pressured you to take time off (aka comp time) instead of pay for overtime, it's because he or she doesn't like you picking their pockets.

Next time a manager pressures you to take comp time send him or her a message - a completed overtime slip. If they give you shit, report the incident to a guild steward.

We're not just talking about one hour increments either.

Remember we are on a 7-and-1/2-hour work day within a nine-hour period (you get 90 minutes for lunch). You are entitled to be paid at the rate of time and a half for every minute worked beyond 7-1/2 hours.

And, if you're called in on your day off, you get a full day of overtime pay, according to our binding contract with the publisher.

Comp time may be nice, but do you ever really get it all back? Some managers have reportedly ripped off staffers on a comp scam at a rate of one-to-one. If you're going to take time off, it should be at time and a half also.

Today the Downward Spiral is launching the "Give Yourself A Well-Deserved Raise" crusade.

As a public service we provide an easy-to-use chart for planning the amount of the raise you want.

And remember what E.T., the extra-terrestrial, once said: "O.T. Phone Home."

YOUR WELL-DESERVED RAISES AT A GLANCE

OVERTIME HOURS MONTHLY/YEARLY				OVERTIME HOURS MONTHLY/YEARLY			
SALARY	RAISE			SALARY	RAISE		
\$600 WK	\$10 WK	1.8	21.7	\$650 WK	\$10 WK	1.7	20.0
	\$20 WK	8.6	43.3		\$20 WK	3.3	40.0
	\$30 WK	5.4	65.0		\$30 WK	5.0	60.0
	\$40 WK	7.2	86.7		\$40 WK	6.7	80.0
	\$50 WK	9.0	108.3		\$50 WK	8.3	100.0
\$700 WK	\$10 WK	1.6	18.6	\$750 WK	\$10 WK	1.4	17.3
	\$20 WK	3.1	37.1		\$20 WK	2.9	34.7
	\$30 WK	4.6	55.7		\$30 WK	4.3	52.0
	\$40 WK	6.2	74.3		\$40 WK	5.8	69.3
	\$50 WK	7.7	92.9		\$50 WK	7.2	86.7

THE ETHICAL DILEMMA: DO I OR DON'T I?

Free Press bosses might be wondering if keeping two editorial voices in Detroit was such a great idea.

Thanks to the Dec. 6 Detroit News, the world now knows all about the messy deal Free Press editors cut with a California source in the Detroit police scandal story.

Is it overly cynical to wonder if Free Press editors would have confessed their sin without some urging from the News?

In their rush to catch up with the News on this fast-breaking story, the Free Press team found some folks who had some goods on Detroit Police Chief William Hart. But there was a catch — editors would have to promise they'd pay the source's legal costs if there were a lawsuit.

The News thought the deal smelled, and turned it down. Staffers at the Free Press might have predicted their own editors would have done the same. After all, hadn't Executive Editor Heath Meriwether and Free Press attorney Herschel Fink lectured the staff last spring on the evils of signing contracts with sources which could financially obligate the paper? The meeting was called, it seems, because a veteran Free Press reporter acting alone, had guaranteed in writing not to reveal a source's name in the newspaper. Editors were very displeased.

How forgetful the bosses can be! Only six months later, these same managers actually wired a contract to news sources in the Hart probe.

Caught red-handed by the News, Free Press leaders had no choice but to fess up. They did so, sort of, in a Dec. 7 news story.

"I fault myself for making a bad judgment on a breaking pursuit story," said Meriwether. He denied ethical wrongdoing: "I never thought we were in a money transaction."

Well might Heath Meriwether deny the News' charge that the Free Press was "paying for a story."

After all, wasn't it Meriwether who trumpeted his suspension of Pulitzer-prize winning photographer Manny Crisostomo? And for what? Well, allegedly for paying to get news.

Heath Meriwether is an upright fellow, and if he thought for a minute that he'd paid for news, broken a bond of trust, committed the E-sin, no doubt he would do the right thing. Suspend himself for three days and ask Manny Crisostomo to denounce his executive editor's unethical behavior in a Page Three column. But wait — let us not judge too soon, Thanks to attorney Fink, we now know something the News was not aware of when they lambasted the Free Press. How embarrassed indeed must the News have felt to learn from Freep lawyer Fink that "this isn't an ethical issue."

Whew! Thanks to Herschel, the coast is clear. Heath can relax. Checkbook journalism may be good or bad, but it certainly isn't a matter of ethics. Oops, wait a minute. Some major corrections will be needed at the Free Press. Such as removing the section on paying for news in the Freep's 1984 ethical guidelines.

If buying news is not an ethical issue, what was Manny's crime?

Oh, these twists and turns in management thinking. They never stop. In a recent Free Press features staff meeting, Meriwether was asked why sports columnist Mitch Albom was allowed to have a business relationship with a source he continues to cover. Seems Albom and University of Michigan football coach, Bo Schembechler co-authored a biography of Bo, and the columnist hasn't stopped writing adulatory Freep stories about his partner.

Three weeks later, Free Press managers answered the question Dec. 14 running an Albom column on Bo's retirement on Page 1A. "There goes a legend," wrote Albom. "What will Michigan do without Bo? ... Here walks the ultimate coach ... And the feeling is like losing an old friend ... There goes a legend."

(cont.)

Meriwether told staffers that the Schembechler book was a one-time deal for Albom. It won't happen again.

Now, the ethical guidelines are pretty clear about doing business with a source, even once: "A staff member may not enter into a business relationship with a news source."

But a star columnist can get away with it, Meriwether says. Once. Hey, that's pretty neat — one time rights to ethical misconduct. Wonder why Manny couldn't get that deal?

REPORTER'S MIRANDA RIGHTS (Clip along dotted lines)

To be read to journalists arrested on suspicion of ethics crimes

- 1) You have the right to remain silent.
- 2) You have the right to legal or union representation.
- 3) You have the right to know what you are charged with.
- 4) You have the right to tell managers to go _____ themselves.

BELL RINGERS RAISE THEIR OWN CHRISTMAS CHEER

On Dec. 6 - St. Nicholas Day - the Detroit Newspaper Agency filled its own stocking with a newsstand price hike that will reap the papers an additional \$5 million a year.

Wait until they hand themselves their Christmas present. The money will really start rolling in when the company extends the new prices to home delivery.

Five million bucks will seem like a lump of coal then. Applied to all sales, the papers would reap more than seven times that much. A crack team of Downward Spiral arithmeticians figured it out.

Let's be conservative about this. Say the combined papers sell 1 million daily and Sunday issues. If the combined News and Free Press sold a million Sunday copies at \$1 — a 25 cent across-the-board hike — the papers would rake in an extra \$250,000 a day. In a year — 52 Sundays — that's \$13 million from Sunday sales alone.

On weekdays, the News is raising its weekday price by 10 cents, the Free Press is going up a nickel. Take the average of the two, 7.5 cents, multiply it times 1 million, and you get an extra \$75,000 a day.

Figuring 312 weekdays in a year, that's a total annual increase of \$23,400,000. Add the weekday increase of \$23,400,000 to the Sunday increase of \$13 million and it comes out to a rip-off.

Whoops, excuse the Downward Spiral's lapse from objective journealese. We mean, it comes out to \$36.4 million smackers.

AT THE VERY LEAST: \$36.4 million.

THE DOWNWARD SPIRAL HOLIDAY GIFT GUIDE

Stuck for an idea for what to give your favorite Knight-Ridder executive for the holidays? Here are 12 last-minute gift ideas that will be sure to get your bosses' attention.

DISLIPS: Gaily colored packs of paper, brightly festooned with ribbon and covered with your friendly reminders of how much you care about the company. The more, the better.

EXECUTIVE NECKWEAR: Color-coded clip-on badges leave no one's ID in doubt. Comes with silver neck chains whose adjustable loops you can tighten at your convenience.

DIRIEGLESTATIONERY: These plain packs of paper get the attention of the powerful. Comes with invisible ink so no traces are left.

ETHICAL BLACKBOARD, ERASER AND CHALK: Lets them draw the line anywhere and change the rules of the game at a moment's whim!

PRINTERS' CRAYONS: For coloring in papers that leave the presses black-and-white.

ED MEESE CARTOONS: Long suppressed, now finally available, signed by everyone's favorite political cartoonist. Suitable for framing or being framed.

SUBSCRIPTION TO THE L.A. TIMES: Read all about it.

K MART TOY TRUCK: Comes with paper loader and stopwatch.

ELECTRONIC AD FINDER: Instantly locates those troublesome missing advertisements. Saves thousands of dollars in lost accounts. Comes with scissors and glue to get them back into the paper.

MOST VALUED SOURCE BEEPER: Indicates the current location of all known white middle-class crack addicts. Digital readout displays their current monetary, dietary and transportation needs. Saves valuable time.

THE "HOLD HARMLESS" LEGAL AID KIT: With the flick of a switch, renders any source powerless to resist the lures of altruistic journalism. Post-fact denial mechanism optional.

And, finally, for that executive who has everything...

THE COMPLETE CUSTOMER-OBSSESSED EXECUTIVE EXERCISER: For the busy honcho who has to get up early in the morning to beat the competition. The most beneficial exerciser known to doctors. This bending, lifting, walking and tossing regimen tones the muscles for a day of power lunching and lets the executive get close to his customers. Many long and arduous routes now available in metropolitan Detroit, abandoned by disgruntled carriers.

DOWNWARD SPIRAL QUIZ:

What's wrong with this column that ran in the Dec. 13 editions of the Free Press sports section?

Wednesday, Dec. 13, 1989 ••



Need gift ideas? Just throw the books at 'em

Give the gift of reading. That's what we say around here. And with only two weeks until Christmas, you'd better get moving to catch these brand new sports books, hot off the presses for the holiday season:

■ **"BETCHA FIVE BUCKS THAT CAKE DON'T RISE"** — The Pete Rose Cookbook.

■ **"THEY SAID WHAT?"** The Jon Koncak Story.

■ **"EVERYTHING I NEED TO KNOW, I AIN'T LEARNED IN KINDERGARTEN"** — The World According to Sparky Anderson.

Mitch Albom will sign copies of the book "Bo" and "Decade Of Champions" Friday, 5-6 p.m., at the Community News Center, Liberty Street, Ann Arbor, and Saturday, 3-4 p.m. at Little Professor of Farmington, Grand River and Halsted.

Answer: The actual books for sale and plugged at the end of the column are not previewed. Since the sports editor was trying to avoid an obvious ethical problem here, the Downward Spiral previews those books for you:

■ **"BO"** - Is that body odor I smell or the arbitrary use of the Free Press' ethical guidelines?

■ **"Decade of Champions"** - A Detroit JOA retrospective by SOB's from Gannett, Knight-Ridder and the U.S. Supreme Court. Forward pass by Ed Meese; Backward pass by Justice Byron "Whizzer" White.

NEXT ISSUE: The mystery of management bonuses - TDS shows you an actual MBO plan!

Viva La First Amendment: Your writing & graphic contributions to the Downward Spiral are needed.