

WE

Richard Stupart

We were many things stepping into class in February. A nurse. A computer programmer, a couple of recently-graduated students. We could all have continued with our different lives, all of us, but we chose to come here. Made a decision to learn the craft. For some it is a pragmatic choice. A desire to be something journalist-like. A writer perhaps. Or a public relations demon. For most, however, there was a degree of idealism to this choice. An idea of the life we could have had, challenged by a life that we felt had meaning for us to pursue. The life we had lost.

We will be the next generation of journalists. Foot soldiers in a world that, we are told, is forgetting why we are needed. One which increasingly needs us, even as it makes it impossible to ever be what we as a profession once were.

That being a journalist will be difficult does not blunt our determination. What it does do, is demand that we learn differently to our peers of a decade ago, if we are to thrive in the world of a decade to come.



THE JOURNALISTS OF TOMORROW

Fix the economics

We are taught the details of Old Media economics. Then we are taught that enterprises based on Old Media economics are becoming bankrupt. That this is no longer a sustainable model as New Media gouges the books of media organisations. But what are the economics of New Media? How have organisations made blogs, online news and new technologies work to sustain good journalism?

If they have done so, we want, we *need*, to know how. If not, then we need an understanding of what was tried. Of how it failed and why. The economics of advertiser-paying or subscriber-paying for newspapers will no longer exist in the years to come. If we are to survive in the media organisations of the future, we need not to repeat the mistakes of the media in the last decade in dealing with the onset of the New Media world.

Add a little propeller head

The future is in online media, apparently. Blogs, digital media, aggregating or mediating the cacophony of voices in a newly democratised space. That online, in some or other form, will come to matter – and matter a great deal – is obvious. For all of the learning about the coming role of New Media, we will also need the skills to *use* this platform.

We must not become a next generation of journalists

who cannot blog. Who cannot understand how a web page is distributed, managed, mixed in with video and user and self-generated content. Who, worse still, haven't learned what these terms mean.

Without a fundamental grasp of the skills that underlie our future distribution platform, we risk becoming verbal specialists in an age of technological generalists. Dinosaurs from the moment we graduate.

Stir over a strong heat

Stoke our fire. We came here believing that journalism meant something more than a pay cheque. For most of us, there is an idealism to it. A profound sense that South Africa, that the world, needs people to go and tell it the stories it would rather ignore in an age where we often prefer entertainment, channels drowning in spin. Though it may seem silly, laughable, improbable – many of us really do see ourselves as breakers of the big stories, correspondents from the dangerous places, bringers of truth to the powerful who have come to believe it can be evaded forever.

This is what drove many of us from the comfortable lives we could have led, into a discipline where principle is paramount. The more we believe these dreams, the further we will go beyond the basic j-school curriculum, the

hungrier you will find us.

So if you cannot find a journalist mentor for the strangely over-passionate kid, pair him with an investigatory civil society group perhaps. Or some not-quite-formalised activist group that works at the edge of where the mainstream press reports.

It's not quite a classic newsroom mentorship, but is a world more preferable than being told there was nobody who matched our profile. There are people in places that would afford us the chance to learn what being an investigative journalist is like, out there where the stories matter.

The world of the journalist is changing fundamentally. Yet without predicting the destination, it's possible to know the trajectory. To teach relevant, practical skills for a newsroom that will be increasingly online across multiple media. More than knowing why the old models are dying, we must learn how the new models are growing. How we can be a useful part of that new ecosystem.

Teach us this. Then humour our dreams of being journalists that matter in the world of tomorrow. Sure, we may end up writing sports reports or fluff for FHM. Ideals have a habit of coming up short.

Yet they are what drove almost two dozen of us to divert our lives to be here, and it is what will push us above and beyond the demands of simple coursework to do exceptional things.

Prepare us. Entertain our extravagant idealism. We will not disappoint.