

Friends or Flacks?

Exploring trust in the public relations practitioner/ journalist relationship

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Abstract

This paper attempts to explore the relationship between public relations (PR) practitioners and journalists, and how trust in this established relationship impacts the extent to which a journalist will work collaboratively with a PR professional— or, more directly, the relationship between the degree of trust between a PR professional and a journalist and the extent to which the journalist engages in the agenda building process with that PR professional. The literature will examine two hypotheses: 1) Journalists prefer to work with public relations practitioners who they trust - who are open, honest and relatable, and 2). How journalists view trust is ever evolving, and things like political climate, social media, popular culture and organizational issues can impact trust in this relationship. Theories explored in this paper include the Agenda Building process, Agenda Setting Theory, Information Subsidies, Source Credibility Theory and Attitudes. The primary source of research includes personal interviews with current journalists who work for Twin Cities (Minneapolis/St. Paul) based news organizations. The personal interviews support the first hypothesis – that journalists find it easier and more helpful to work directly with PR practitioners whom they already have an established relationship with and particularly those that they trust, but results are mixed on the second hypothesis—that factors outside of this relationship (political climate, social media influence, popular culture and organizational issues) have an effect on trust within the relationship. The paper concludes with recommendations for PR professionals on how to navigate relationships with journalists in light of these new external factors to build the agenda and ultimately share intended messages with the public.

About the Author

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Dedication

This paper is dedicated to the amazing **Cohort 11** for being top notch classmates and friends over the last two years. From presentations on Scientology and customer journeys to memorizing numerous theories and archetypes, I'm honored to have learned and laughed through this with all of you. We did it! (Shout out to The Beacon House for fueling



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Introduction

One of the most important and tactical roles in the field of public relations (PR) is creating and maintaining interdependent relationships with journalists (Jackson & Moloney, 2015; Shaw & White, 2004; Waters, Tindall, & Morton, 2011). But, this relationship is complex, can be hostile (DeLorme & Fedler, 2003; Griggs, 2016; Shaw & White, 2004) and has been described as “symbiosis among friendly adversaries” (Berkowitz & Adams, 1990). Journalists, at times, feel PR practitioners are unethical, manipulative, one-sided and deceptive (DeLorme & Fedler, 2003). They criticize PR practitioners for only serving special interests, rather than the needs of the public (DeLorme & Fedler, 2003). Further, journalists also feel that PR practitioners don’t understand what constitutes news and the rigorous schedule that journalists must adhere to (Jackson & Moloney, 2015). These attitudes are puzzling, because research shows that journalists depend heavily on PR practitioners for information and journalists acknowledge that somewhere between 25-80 percent of the content of news media in the United States is influenced by PR practitioners (Mellado & Hanusch, 2011; L. M. Sallot, Steinfatt, & Salwen, 1998; Lynne M. Sallot & Johnson, 2006a).

So, where did the antagonism between journalists and PR practitioners begin? While the scholarly evidence is mixed, a handful of authors point to the end of World War I (DeLorme & Fedler, 2003; Lloyd & Toogood, 2015; Supa & Zoch, 2008). At that time, journalists believed and feared that practitioners were earning free publicity, and that it would eventually reduce the use of advertising at the newspaper (which at the time was the largest revenue stream) (DeLorme & Fedler, 2003).

Today, researchers indicate that although the PR practitioner-journalist relationship is tense and complex, the outright animosity may be exaggerated and generalized (DeLorme & Fedler, 2003). However, because journalists at times see PR practitioners only fulfilling their own organizational needs and not the needs of the journalist and public at large, an animosity between the two closely aligned groups still exists (DeLorme & Fedler, 2003; Lynne M. Sallot & Johnson, 2006a). At the heart of this issue, PR practitioners “see their influence as augmenting the marketplace of ideas by giving voice to their clients,” and journalists “fear that affluent sources that already exert undue influence will restrict the media marketplace” which can put the two at odds when disseminating and delivering information to the public (DeLorme & Fedler, 2003; L. M. Sallot et al., 1998; Lynne M. Sallot & Johnson, 2006a).

Popular culture and its portrayal of both industries is not helpful to dispelling stereotypes of both industries, either. PR practitioners are portrayed as spin doctors or ‘paid mouths’ intent on promoting their clients in a positive light, regardless of truth (Davies, 2008). Alternatively, journalists are either portrayed as someone who cannot distinguish between facts and opinions, or bullies who will live and die for the pursuit of truth, seek out scandal and deception, and are overly intrusive — putting themselves and others in danger (Davies, 2008). The current presidential administration, which coined the phrase “fake news” and frankly expresses their distrust in the media, also cast a bad light on the journalism industry and encourage the public to remain skeptical about the news media.

Background

Those who pursue PR as a career choice are often taught that relationships are paramount in becoming an effective PR practitioner. But, with new factors impacting this working partnership between the two industries, we first must take a step back to see how both parties are working together to achieve mutually beneficial roles.

To truly grasp this relationship as it stands today, it's important to understand the work environments of both journalists and PR practitioners to better explain the landscape of the respective industries. Numerous authors and researchers support the claim that American newsrooms are shrinking, and journalists are expected to build extensive multimedia stories providing many touchpoints to their readership (Griggs, 2016; Vos & Craft, 2016). For example, typical journalists may utilize social media posts, live shots, photos, video and infographics to accompany their developing news story. Today, journalists are expected to not only be a strong writer and communicator, but to also understand social media and have more technical skills than ever before (Vos & Craft, 2016). Not to mention, there is an extreme pressure from news organizations to be the first to deliver a 'scoop' or break a news story. Alternatively, PR professionals outnumber journalists by an astonishing five-to-one ratio (Moloney, Jackson, & McQueen, 2013).

According to a recent study, the typical American journalist is a white, college educated, 47-year-old man who studied journalism or communication during his undergraduate education (Vos & Craft, 2016). Researchers note that journalists act as generalists more frequently in today's newsroom compared to 20 years ago, and don't stick to one 'beat' or topic (Charron,

1989; Vos & Craft, 2016). As generalists, journalists are responsible to deliver stories to satisfy their assignment editor. Although they may have professional autonomy on what they write, they lack complete control over the subject of their content and their work is often edited by someone with less background or knowledge on the subject (Vos & Craft, 2016).

Journalists are strapped for time, can be less interested and invested in the topics they are covering and often have a limited depth of knowledge on the subjects that they write about (Charron, 1989). Studies show that journalists now produce three times as much copy as they did 20 years ago (Moloney et al., 2013). Due to time constraints and increased pressure to produce stories for multiple media, journalists are increasingly deskbound and rely on information subsidies, or pre-packaged content developed specifically for the media, from PR practitioners to file their stories in a timely manner (Jackson & Moloney, 2015; Moloney et al., 2013; Pang, Chiong, Begam, & Hassan, 2014).

Journalists are working long hours in a tumultuous environment, as layoffs and downsizing within the newsroom is common (DeLorme & Fedler, 2003; Waters et al., 2011). These shifts within the newsroom have been a transition for PR practitioners as well. Veteran PR practitioners are used to journalists who are specialists writing for their industry's target audience, have more resources at their disposal and more easily comprehend the source's point of view because they have a deeper subject knowledge (Charron, 1989). Working with generalists means that PR practitioners must prepare more information subsidies to educate journalists and to position their organization in the best light.

In public relations, one major practice of a practitioner, in an effort to advance the perception of their organization, is conducted through media relations (Jackson & Moloney, 2015). In media relations, practitioners seek favorable publicity for their organization's products or services, in order to enhance that organization's reputation (Pang, 2009). Media relations includes maintaining media contacts, responding to requests from media members, creating news releases, organizing press events (such as press conferences), and providing information subsidies, or pre-packaged content developed for the media (Pang et al., 2014). One intended goal of media relations is to "think like a journalist" and assist in a majority of the work that a journalist would do, such as gathering background information or connecting with interview sources, in an effort to further influence media coverage and, ultimately, to gain organizational credibility to meet business objectives (Pang et al., 2014).

One model for media relations, called mediating the media, highlights three main features that a PR practitioner uses to conduct media relations (Pang, 2009; Pang et al., 2014). First, the practitioner must engage in proactive media relations, or take an aggressive, high profile approach to promote an organization and its products or services, to gain maximum control over the media (Pang, 2009). Next, practitioners hold the responsibility of cultivating strong relationships with media partners (Pang, 2009; Pang et al., 2014). Finally, to maintain strong relationships, they must understand the environment in which the journalist operates (Pang, 2009; Pang et al., 2014).

Between journalists and PR practitioners, the responsibility of maintaining a strong relationship falls most heavily on the practitioner's shoulders (Jackson & Moloney, 2015; Lynne

M. Sallot & Johnson, 2006a). So, not only is the practitioner responsible to gain favorable coverage about the organization they represent, but they are also responsible to journalists to deliver information in a timely and easily understood format. To do this, practitioners must undergo media training, monitor media platforms to understand coverage, improve their own writing skills and understand the routines of the journalists they work with (Pang et al., 2014; Lynne M. Sallot & Johnson, 2006b).

All this to say, journalists rely on PR practitioners to deliver credible stories packaged together in a way that makes their job easier, and research shows that journalism that has been subsidized by public relations influence is a cost saving to their newsrooms because it requires fewer resources (Moloney et al., 2013). At the same time, PR practitioners rely on journalists to cover their organizations in a positive light to build awareness and third party credibility (Davies, 2008; Pincus, Rimmer, Rayfield, & Cropp, 1993). A journalist using information from a PR practitioner is seen not only as a primary audience for the practitioner, but also as a medium through which the practitioner reaches the larger public. While PR practitioners attempt to reach a broader public, journalists also act as gatekeepers — representing and responding to the public's 'need to know' (Aronoff, 1975). For PR practitioners to serve as messengers for their organizations, they must have credibility with journalists and the public so that the messages resonate. In addition, public relations is focused on maintaining relationships with key stakeholders, and the building of relationships depends on trustworthiness (Rawlins, 2007).

Literature Review

Trust is such a fragile human feeling, but crucial in the relationship between journalists and PR practitioners (Moloney, 2005). But how do these parties define the trust on which they so heavily rely?

A recent literature study shows that there is little agreement on what definitive factors capture the idea of trust, and that there is certainly need for increased clarity on the conceptualization and measurement of trust (Kazoleas & Teven, 2007). Merriam-Webster defines trust as an “assured reliance on the character, ability, strength or truth of someone or something; one in which confidence is placed (Merriam-Webster, 2016).” Trust, inherently, is something people can sense, but they have a hard time describing, and many say that “you know it when you feel it” (Rawlins, 2007).

In courts of law, a witness is required to tell the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth – but false testimony may be given or empirical evidence can be wrongly interpreted (Davies, 2008). As a personality trait, trust is viewed as “an expectancy held by an individual or a group that the word, promise, verbal or written statement of another individual or group can be relied upon” (Rawlins, 2007; Rotter, 1967). In a social interaction, trust may not be a feeling, but more of a conscious regulation of one’s dependence on another, and through interdependent relationships, it functions as a way to reduce uncertainty. (Rawlins, 2007; Zand, 1972). Trust between two individuals, or dyadic trust, is reliant upon reciprocity – where one person’s trust in another strongly influences the other’s trust in that person (Rawlins, 2007). Trust is built on social capital, or a built network of supportive people, and also builds an

expectation that others will treat us supportively in the future, because they have done so in the past (Moloney, 2005).

Trust in organizations is a bit more complex in that it relies on three different factors: ability (reliability, confidence, outcomes), benevolence (lack of malice and goodwill) and integrity (honesty, accuracy) (Kazoleas & Teven, 2007; Rawlins, 2007). In fact, researchers have discussed these three factors as an important opportunity for measuring trust scientifically (Kazoleas & Teven, 2007). In the context of an organization, trust has been defined by researchers as a “collective judgment of one group that another group will be honest, meet commitments, and will not take advantage of others” (Rawlins, 2007). The role of trust is critical to gaining credibility with the media and ultimately the audiences that PR practitioners serve (Rawlins, 2007).

So, how is trust built in the PR practitioner/ journalist relationship? Some speculate that it is behavior that earns trust, not messages– that trust is the gift of the PR message receiver; it is not the gift of the PR message sender, and that PR practitioners cannot demand it or insist upon receiving it (Moloney, 2005). Because the role of PR practitioner is to act as a gatekeeper between an organization and the media, it’s imperative that journalists trust the PR practitioners from which they’re receiving information (Lynne M. Sallot & Johnson, 2006a). Distrust can lead to unfair and misleading media coverage, which in turn will lead to public distrust and apprehension, and can create issues for the organization and the PR professional (Supa & Zoch, 2008).

Source Credibility

Credibility and trustworthiness are the cornerstone attributes that PR practitioners must possess to influence the public's attitudes and perceptions of their organization (Aronoff, 1975; Callison, 2001, 2004; Priester & Petty, 2003; Rawlins, 2007; Lynne M. Sallot & Johnson, 2006a; Sinaga & Callison, 2008a). Source credibility explains the judgments made by a message recipient concerning the believability of the communicator (Callison, 2001). Competence, or the expertise of the source, and trustworthiness, or belief of the integrity of the message or the person delivering the message, are the two strongest components of source credibility (Aronoff, 1975; Callison, 2001; Rawlins, 2007). In addition, characteristics like gender, race, speed of speech, dialect or accent and job title can impact credibility and influence the effectiveness of the message being shared (Aronoff, 1975; Callison, 2001).

Homophily, or the "love of the same," is one concept that influences source credibility and is often referenced by researchers studying this topic (Aronoff, 1975; Sinaga & Callison, 2008b; Waters, Tindall, & Morton, 2010). Homophily explains that individuals inherently trust those who are similar in beliefs and life situations (Aronoff, 1975; Callison, 2001). In 1969, McGuire reported greater communication effectiveness when sources were perceived as equal or similar to their receiver in social status, and from this, we can draw the conclusion that journalists assign credibility to sources who seem to be equivalent in occupational status (Aronoff, 1975). Several investigations found that many current PR practitioners were former journalists (DeLorme & Fedler, 2003). Journalists believe PR practitioners who were formerly journalists understand and share similar values, building credibility (DeLorme & Fedler, 2003).

In present day interactions between journalists and PR practitioners, face to face communication is underutilized, which could affect source credibility. In Aronoff's influential 1975 study, his research noted that much of the information that PR practitioners are attempting to share with journalists is communicated fairly impersonally (at the time through a press release) (Aronoff, 1975). This detached communication is still occurring, and information is shared even more impersonally through email and other less rich means of communication, which is more often preferred by journalists (Jackson & Moloney, 2015). This is an interesting reflection of media richness theory, which originally found that richer forms of media, such as in-person meetings and phone calls are more effective forms of communication (Daft & Lengel, 1986; Jackson & Moloney, 2015). It is possible that these richer forms of communication are more effective, but are less preferred by journalists, who work in a fast-paced environment and are attempting to be more efficient (Jackson & Moloney, 2015).

Researchers agree that trust and credibility creates a larger opportunity for agenda setting (Spiro Kiouisis, Mitrook, Wu, & Seltzer, 2010; Lynne M. Sallot & Johnson, 2006a). Generally speaking, researchers have found that somewhere between 25-80 percent of the content of news media in the United States is influenced by PR practitioners (Mellado & Hanusch, 2011; Lynne M. Sallot & Johnson, 2006a).

Attitudes

Hovland and Weiss first introduced the importance of the attitudes of an audience toward an information source in relation to the effectiveness of communication in 1951 (Aronoff, 1975; Hovland & Weiss, 1951). Journalists generally hold negative attitudes toward

the field of public relations, with journalists harboring condescending views of practitioners' news judgment and professional position (Aronoff, 1975; Lynne M. Sallot & Johnson, 2006a; Supa & Zoch, 2008). Yet, while journalists believe practitioners lack credibility because they are motivated by self-interest, there are surprising similarities between journalists and practitioners, such as shared news values (Aronoff, 1975; Lynne M. Sallot & Johnson, 2006a). Journalists tend to rate practitioners' status and professionalism as a whole much lower than their own (Lynne M. Sallot & Johnson, 2006a). But, when asked about specific PR practitioners that they've worked with recently, they rank those practitioners they know more favorably (Lynne M. Sallot & Johnson, 2006a). Attitude toward a source is foundationally important and directly impacts the learning of the content, or information subsidies, shared (Hovland & I., 1951).

Agenda Building

Cohen's 1963 groundbreaking agenda-setting metaphor is one of the most widely used theories to explain the transfer of salience between media coverage on certain topics and the extent of public concern about the same topic (Cohen, 1963; Kim & Kioussis, 2012). Agenda setting suggested that media do not tell us what to think, but rather what to think *about*, and, further, McCombs and Shaw's research extrapolated that in the second level of agenda setting that media tell us *how* to think about issues and objects, by the placement of emphasis on certain attributes (Carroll & McCombs, 2003; Kim & Kioussis, 2012; Spiro Kioussis et al., 2010; Lynne M. Sallot & Johnson, 2006a). Simplified more, first level agenda setting effects are on attention, where second level agenda setting effects are on comprehension (Carroll & McCombs, 2003; Kim & Kioussis, 2012).

But, who shapes what a journalist shares with the public? Agenda building focuses on who sets the media agenda in the first place (Kim & Kiousis, 2012). According to agenda building theory, developed by Shaw and McCombs, the relationship between PR practitioners and journalists is extremely important for developing news content and influencing the mass media agenda (Spiro Kiousis et al., 2010; McCombs & Shaw, 1972; Pincus et al., 1993; Lynne M. Sallot & Johnson, 2006a). More than any other factor, public relations activities are seen as principal in influencing media agenda (Spiro Kiousis et al., 2010).

Largely, agenda building is the process of creating mass media agendas, namely where PR practitioners provide media with newsworthy materials or ideas in an attempt to convince a journalist to publish ideally favorable information about their organization (Berkowitz & Adams, 1990; Kim & Kiousis, 2012; Spiro Kiousis et al., 2010; Pincus et al., 1993) Agenda building can be broken into two levels (Kim & Kiousis, 2012). The first level focuses on the salience of objects, and the second involves the salience of attributes, or “the set of perspectives or frames that journalists and the public employ to think about each object” (Kim & Kiousis, 2012; Spiro Kiousis et al., 2010).

PR practitioners disseminate information for journalists using information subsidies. Information subsidies include prepackaged information delivered to journalists to promote an organizations’ viewpoints on issues with little time or financial investment such as press conferences, news releases, interviews and other content (Charron, 1989; Kim & Kiousis, 2012; S. Kiousis & Xu Wu, 2008; Spiro Kiousis et al., 2010; Knight, 1999; Lynne M. Sallot & Johnson, 2006a; Supa & Zoch, 2008; Tilley & Hollings, 2008; Waters et al., 2011). PR practitioners

essentially pre-report for journalists, providing them with accessible information to make their job easier (Supa & Zoch, 2008).

When building information subsidies, PR practitioners frame, or shape, the message by highlighting certain aspects of the news by making it more noticeable and memorable for journalists, and also by making the information easily repurposed by journalists who have limited time to produce content (Spiro Kiouisis et al., 2010; Lynne M. Sallot & Johnson, 2006a). The strongest information subsidies have local relevance and provide a concrete news event, as compared to documents that focus wholly on promotion (Berkowitz & Adams, 1990). When practitioners can convince journalists to publish their information subsidies, PR practitioners influence the media agenda, and through that influence on journalists, practitioners can influence the public agenda and ultimately public opinion (Spiro Kiouisis et al., 2010; Lynne M. Sallot & Johnson, 2006a).

All things considered, the PR practitioner-journalist relationship is incredibly important, but remains complex, and at times hostile (Aronoff, 1975; Charron, 1989; DeLorme & Fedler, 2003; Shaw & White, 2004; Tilley & Hollings, 2008). Research in this area is developing, but there are a few areas that haven't been examined that would be important context to addressing this problem.

The following research serves to investigate the importance of trust in the relationship *between* journalists and PR practitioners, and how trust ultimately impacts the likelihood of a journalist covering a story that is influenced by a PR practitioner. More directly, this paper will attempt to answer the following research question: **what is the relationship between the**

degree of trust between a PR professional and a journalist and the extent to which the journalist engages in the agenda building process with that PR professional?

The following primary research will examine two additional research questions:

- 1. Are journalists more likely to work closely with public relations practitioners who they trust - or who are open, honest and relatable?**
- 2. Trust is ever evolving, and things like political climate, social media, popular culture and organizational issues can impact how people define and value trust.**

Research

Method

To better examine the idea of trust and how it impacts the agenda building process, the researcher proposed a study to understand how journalists define trust in their relationship with PR practitioners. To explore this in depth, and gain real world perspective from active journalists, the researcher pursued personal interviews to dive into these topics more directly.

All journalists for this study are employed by Twin Cities (Minneapolis/St. Paul) based media outlets, and vary in medium – including print, online, radio and television journalists. Journalists interviewed would range in years of experience and beat they cover. In an effort to keep the interviews more honest and open, the journalists will not be identified by name or outlet, or other identifying characteristics.

Primary research involved interviewing nine professional journalists via phone who work for media outlets based in the Twin Cities market to learn more about how they perceive trust, their normal interactions with PR practitioners, their current working conditions, and external factors that can impact their work. Interviewees included TV, print and radio journalists and bloggers, and ranged from 3-35+ years of experience. Respondents reported or covered beat areas including sports, business, policy and general assignment and breaking news. All respondents typically have some autonomy to pursue the stories they're interested in, although their editors or producers may have some influence on the content or direction of the story. All respondents within this study were male, and the convenience sample included five journalists with whom the interviewer had a strong working relationship with, which could impact the results.

Interview Guide

During the interview, the research associate would ask a pre-determined list of questions examining both variables including:

Agenda building process:

- Do you work with PR practitioners regularly? If you find a story organically, do you connect with PR practitioners to get interviews/information?
- If so, what is your normal working relationship? Do they pitch you mostly? Or do you reach out to them first?
- How often do PR practitioners play a role in the stories you produce? Not including press releases but actual interaction?
- How do you typically communicate with PR professionals? (Email, phone, text, tweet, in person, etc.). Do you prefer that? How do you prefer to be pitched?
- Some public relations practitioners will fully package stories – including photos, video, fact sheets, press releases, etc. Is this something you prefer? Or do you like to create your own content? Do you think that is because of the shrinking newsroom?
- Do you find the relationship between PR practitioners and journalists to be adversarial or hostile? If so, why? Share examples. Is it changing over time?

Trust:

- How would you define trust?
- How do you think the public defines trust?
- Do you find your news outlet trustworthy? Why?

- Do you trust the PR practitioners you work with?
- What makes you trust/not trust them?
- What qualities do practitioner's have that helps you trust them?
- Do you trust practitioners more or less from an agency or in-house?
- At the U of M, we at times encounter crises and issues, which can impact the public's trust on the institution. Does your view about an organization change your feelings about the PR practitioners you work with?

Background questions:

- Do you feel like it's more difficult to be a journalist under the "fake news" era / new presidential administration? Why?
- How long have you been a journalist? Focus area?
- Do you determine most of the stories you pursue, or are stories more directives of an editor/producer above you?

By gathering information via telephone (a richer form of media), there is an opportunity to dive a bit deeper than a survey traditionally would explore, and there is also an opportunity to ask follow up questions.

By conducting this study, the researcher hopes to give clarity to the factors that affect trust and ultimately agenda building, and provide some constructive feedback to PR practitioners on how to build better relationships, become more trustworthy and credible to their journalist partners and ultimately to be more effective in shaping public opinion.

Research Findings

Results for this research identified several themes and indicated that journalists find some consensus related to trust in the PR practitioner/journalist relationship.

When comparing these results to the initial research questions, results show that journalists more likely to work closely with public relations practitioners who they trust - or who are open, honest and relatable to the journalist. Regarding the second research question, which asked if external factors impact how journalists view trust, the results were mixed. Results showed that factors such as political climate and social media can create skepticism in the public’s perception of trust, but journalists have a consistent definition for how they view trust in the PR practitioner relationship and these external factors have less impact than originally assumed. In addition, the current climate has a positive influence on the importance of a journalist’s job – and portrays the importance of the PR-journalist relationship.

Every journalist works with PR practitioners in some capacity.

All respondents interviewed work directly with PR practitioners, and most say that they work with them frequently. Their interaction includes receiving proactive story pitches from practitioners as well as

“These days, everybody’s PR’d up.”

the journalists reaching out to the PR practitioners for sources, background information and statements. Traditionally, the PR practitioner acts as a gatekeeper to key leadership within an organization, but also provide background information, coordinate interview opportunities, share press releases and more.

Journalists in this study estimate that they collaborate with a PR practitioner for at least 50 percent of the content they create – answers ranging from more than 30 percent of the time to upwards of 95 percent of the time, depending on the journalist’s beat or focus area. Those working in sports or in politics rely more on PR practitioners to connect them to politicians or athletes, meaning they can influence the content creation process more than someone who might cover business or general news and report from press releases or wire services.

Email... everyone uses it. Get used to it.

Nearly all journalists interviewed rely heavily on email to communicate with PR practitioners. Several respondents also discussed richer forms of communication, such as in-person meetings and phone calls, which help build relationships with PR practitioners. One radio reporter shared that he never answers his desk phone at work, and has recorded his outgoing voicemail message to say “just email me” because he prefers sorting through email.

One journalist who covers sports shared that most of his communication with practitioners during the sports season is in person, as these PR practitioners staff all practices and both home and away games. During the off season, email is the more common mode of communication, as typically stories are less time sensitive.

Another journalist who covers politics shared that he studies how a person communicates and learned from their interactions. From this, he used different formats to quickly get the

“As a reporter, I want to... study how that person communicates, so I know... what is the easiest way for me to get in touch with them? What's the way that I'm gonna get in touch with them that is most likely to elicit a prompt response? Because, in most cases, it's relatively time sensitive.”

information that he needed, such as using text messaging and Google’s Gchat to touch base

with some PR practitioners if he knows they respond through those avenues faster. He also mentioned that quite frequently he interacts with journalists in person, both at events and outside of work to socialize, and through those interactions he has established strong relationships.

How much should you package your story? It depends.

When it comes to delivering information subsidies, journalists, for the most part, like when PR practitioners package all materials together for their use. This can save time and effort from a journalist who may be trying to develop up to four stories in one day. However, journalists in this study noted that practitioners must understand that the information provided will be used at the discretion of the editor and the reporter. This can vary depending on outlets. Some TV outlets, for example, cannot use certain video clips due to policies and FCC regulations. In radio, having background information and some talking points prepared is helpful, as long as the package also includes a live guest available for an appearance on air. Typically, a talk radio host with 3 or more hours of airtime could have as many as 6-12 segments to fill in each show.

“Let's say I have time to write three stories in a day, but I have four options to choose from... two different...office buildings [will] be built... maybe they'll hire the same amount of people, but if one has renderings of what that office will look like...and the other one doesn't, both providing the same information, I'll write the one that has the renderings more times than anything, because [our website] it's very image heavy. I like to also plug those images into anything social media-wise that we do, so the shareability of that story plays a huge factor in... whether or not I will actually write that story.”

An additional consideration is the outlets online presence. Some news organizations have a more defined and robust online presence through their website and social media

channels, where others do not. Packaged materials, such as photos, tend to be more valuable to those who can use the information in more places – such as being shared on social media, embedded on the news outlet’s website and/ or shown in broadcast.

Hostility? Less than you’d think.

Overall, respondents did not find their relationship with PR practitioners to be overly hostile or adversarial, however, all respondents justified that this certainly depends on which PR practitioner they’re working with, and the situation and the context in which they are working together. For example, for those journalists that the researcher spoke to who are assigned to a specific beat such as a sports team or specific

“I don't find it overly adversarial. In fact, conversely find it collegial and cooperative. On the rare occasion that it isn't, then something has gone wrong. You use the term PR professional, and a true professional will be cognizant that they're there to facilitate dialogue...and others clearly understand those boundaries.”

political sector or office, tend to build strong relationships with PR practitioners because they’re working with them almost daily. Conversely, those who are covering general news or a larger beat, such as business or government, may not have relationships as strong, because they are not working together as frequently.

It appears that this relationship becomes more adversarial when a journalist is reporting critically about an issue or topic that is less favorable to an organization or individual. The relationship can also become hostile from the journalist’s perspective if the PR practitioner is serving as a strong-armed gatekeeper and intentionally denying access to information or executives. One journalist mentioned that due to the nature of this relationship, a PR practitioner really has no space to be adversarial or hostile if they are pitching something

proactively – they are asking for coverage, which means that the journalist has more power to accept or decline.

Trust is formed through honesty and understanding.

In considering the PR practitioner/journalist relationship, most of the respondents believe that trust is defined as honesty and understanding. One respondent said point blank – don't lie and don't mislead. This means being forthcoming with information, even if it is not always beneficial for the PR practitioner and the organization they represent. Journalists explain that being forthcoming, even in explaining why they can't provide certain information or access is helpful from a PR practitioner.

On that same note, being responsive and delivering on the needs of the reporter appears to be paramount in this relationship. Following through on promises, being professional and fair but also treating journalists like they're real people also goes far in creating and maintaining trust in this relationship. Additionally, a few respondents mentioned that this relationship is mutually beneficial, so responsibility does not lie only on the PR practitioner to maintain trust – journalists feel that they also must maintain a strong rapport with PR practitioners to meet their needs as well.

“That’s where I lose trust... when I feel like people instill a sense of confidence in the situation and then they disappear.”

The public’s definition of trust has shifted.

When it comes to the publics they're writing for, journalists appear to struggle with the idea of trust. Many agreed that accurate, bipartisan and unbiased information is how they feel

the public should view trust, but it involves so much more than that. As one reporter mentioned, at times journalists feel gratified if they're "pissing off both sides equally" they're succeeding – because it means you're creating work that doesn't cater to one side of the aisle more than another.

"[There's] this thought in journalism that if you're pissing off both sides equally, you're doing your job, and I think there's truth to that."

One journalist mentioned that their outlet has made a more concerted effort to avoid adjectives in their reporting as to not editorialize any news coverage. Another said that they do their best to not scare people needlessly when it comes to news they're sharing. Yet another mentioned that timely, quick and correct information is what the public finds trustworthy, which puts more pressure on news organizations to be the first to share information.

One journalist discussed the current presidential administration, and how the era of "fake news" and President Trump's vocal distrust of the media has impacted the public's trust. "I think that the issue with trust right now is so fragmented because people believe what they believe, and there's news sources that they can go get whatever they believe. So anybody who says something they don't believe in, they don't trust," he shared. He believes the public's trust boils down to someone saying or validating what they already believe.

Another mentioned that he doesn't know if his outlet has a "base audience" anymore, and that the election has changed how the public seeks information and where they put their trust. These changes have become more prevalent in the new presidential administration.

"After this thing [election], I feel like I don't even know if our publication has... a base audience or anything anymore."

PR practitioners inside an organization have more access than those from an agency.

When asked about how they view PR practitioners who work in an agency as compared to those who work in-house for an organization, nearly all of the journalists interviewed had worked with both, and believed that where a PR practitioner worked didn't really factor in to trust. However, a few respondents shared that those working for an agency tend to be pitching stories

"I think organizations, PR people that are on the payroll and part of the administration of the organization, to me, I have an easier time developing relationships, where corporate PR, I just feel like I'm being pitched when I hear from them."

proactively on behalf of their client, and they viewed those who worked in-house to be working more reactively, responding to requests. Research respondents also believe that agency partners have less insider access or clout to get the needed information or access to executives at the organizational level. One respondent acknowledged that agencies are frequently used by organizations that are small and cannot afford to have a full time PR practitioner on staff.

Journalists also find trust in PR practitioners who formally were journalists, because they are perceived to understand the demands of the newsroom more than PR practitioners who were not prior journalists. One respondent even suggested that journalists "retire" into PR because there is more variety and the hours are more stable.

"...they get a little bored, and they see the variety... The variety is just a little different and a little larger... and I think that... is an incentive for people to move from PR to journalism."

Outside factors can impact Journalist/PR practitioner relationships, but only slightly.

At times, there are additional factors that can impact trust in the PR practitioner/journalist relationship, such as an issue or crisis at the organizational level. However, all of the journalists interviewed shared that an organizational issue itself wouldn't impact trust, provided the individual didn't trigger the crisis or is not directly involved. Rather the attitude of the PR practitioner in the heat of the organizational issue would impact trust with a journalist.

"I find that PR professionals are doing a good job and the only frustrations I at times have, are with the people that they work for."

So, if an organization is going through a difficult time, and a PR practitioner is adversarial or is intentionally unhelpful, this could impact the relationship built between the two. But, the crisis itself wouldn't change trust levels alone. One journalist even mentioned that when he is working with PR practitioners that he has an established relationship with who are facing a crisis, he develops empathy for that person.

"I go, "Oh, man, you're having a long day, aren't you?" ...If anything, it develops empathy. I just feel like, "Okay, this is what you're dealing with today." And if I happen to be assigned to that, it's like, "Well, I'm really sorry but here's what I need. What can you tell me?""

Political discourse is impacting the work of journalists

Since the 2016 presidential election cycle, there has been a heightened pronouncement of distrust in the media, including from the President himself. From the journalists interviewed, there are mixed perspectives on how this administration and era of "fake news" will impact

their livelihoods moving forward, but as one respondent exclaimed, “It’s more difficult, but it’s never been more important.”

As noted by several respondents, journalism ethical standards for reporting truth have always existed. On that same note, many agree that the scrutiny and cynicism surrounding the practice have always existed too, but with an outspoken presidential administration, there has certainly been an increase of both. One journalist who mostly covers sports, said that he’s thought about how important his role as compared to colleagues who cover more political issues. But he believes that people look to his writing as an escape from the trials of everyday life, and he’s comfortable serving that purpose in light of bigger problems in the world.

Another one mentioned that he now feels like his job is more appreciated than it has been before – and that people thank him for doing his job well, something he hadn’t experienced earlier in his career.

“Never before, until Trump became president, have people, random people, sources, politicians... gone out of their way to thank me for doing my job and to express their appreciation that I am doing this job. That has never happened and I, you know, get sources saying... “How are you holding up? We just appreciate what you do. We may not always agree. We appreciate everything you do.” That’s pretty indicative of the environment that we’re in right now.”

Some respondents shared that, conversely, their job may be easier because there is so much more to write about, and they feel more energized to do the work than ever before. Another journalist mentioned that this heightened hostility toward the media is an opportunity for journalists to build their reputation with their audience and show that they are a source for credible information.

Social media is commonplace in journalism, but adds pressure

Social media has added increased pressure to journalists to deliver stories faster, as citizen journalism increases in impact and stories begin to break on Twitter. Even now, tweets signed from the President become news stories. This puts more pressure on journalists to be writing faster and constantly updating online coverage – or to try to be the first one to break a news story.

One radio producer has noticed that companies, organizations and individuals are using their own channels to share messages with the public as opposed to using a news outlet to disseminate the message with a larger audience. This means that it can be harder to find guests to put on air than ever before, because organizations feel more control over sharing their own message directly with their audience. In addition, because social media has such a tie back to the presidential administration, one journalist believes that companies are more sensitive to stories going viral online, and try to avoid it at all costs, making them unnecessarily cautious in all external communication, including media interviews.

“The old days... [Bad news] didn't go past Minneapolis. So, if...another local company was in trouble, the guy just came on the radio. And you've got 60% of all the people listening to radio in the cities, and he got his message out. And now they can control it through Twitter, and blogs, and Facebook, they can control the message and not have to answer any questions.”

Social media and the use of the internet have also provided some benefits that make a journalist's job easier. First, as one journalist points out, social media is a great tool for communicating instantly, and at the TV station where he works they are transitioning into more social media live streaming to share news. Facebook's algorithm allows live streaming to reach

more people in their newsfeeds. For a print journalist covering sports, Twitter is a place where he can first break his story, and share constant information with fans. He believes that Twitter helps with his credibility, because he can be the first one to share the information.

Two of the interviewees mentioned that popular shows like VEEP show the inner workings of press secretaries and internal communications teams in politics, and how they interface with journalists from news outlets. Although exaggerated, both believed it showed some truth to why hostility remains in the high stress world of politics.

Additional themes and thoughts

Although initially researchers believed that interviewing journalists with whom they had established personal relationships could impact openness and willingness to share honest answers, results showed that most journalists shared similar sentiments. This shows that journalists with whom the researcher had a previously established relationship were forthcoming with information.

Respondents for these interviews ranged in experience level from three to thirty-five or more years of experience. But, even with a large age range, the only noticeable differences in responses to questions were related to social media and politics – or external factors. This was mainly due to the fact that early-career journalists hadn't experienced the industry without social media being a normal part of reporting a story. In addition, two of the youngest journalists interviewed started their careers during the election cycle, and have witnessed the change in political climate unfold over the past couple of years, before they were full time journalists.

Research Limitations and Opportunities for Future Exploration

There are several limitations of note in this research. First, the convenience sample size of 9 personal interviews with current journalists is quite small. This was due to scheduling conflicts and timing constraints from journalists. Generally speaking, this was due to the nature of their work - other breaking news meant that several interviews were postponed and never rescheduled.

Of those nine interviewees, all of the respondents were male. This sample is not reflective of the population of Twin Cities journalists – although it matches the average profile mentioned earlier in the literature review – but happened to be the most accessible for this study. The goal was to have an even mix of males to females, but unfortunately due to scheduling issues this did not occur. In addition to a lack of gender diversity, there was also a lack of racial diversity in the sample, as most of the respondents were Caucasian. Again, this is not entirely representative of the Twin Cities media market. It would be interesting to see how gender and race would impact the results of the study.

The biggest limitation of this study is that the convenience sample included five journalists with whom the researcher had an established working relationship with. This could mean those five respondents could have been less forthcoming with information, as to not damage an existing relationship they had with a PR practitioner. All interviews were prefaced with a disclaimer that answers would not impact professional relationships between the interviewer and interviewee. The research results showed that respondents who previously had

a personal relationship with the researcher provided congruent answers to those who didn't have a prior relationship, leading researchers to believe that the established relationships did not skew the results.

The research by design gathered results for only one major media market, Minneapolis/St. Paul. This was intentional, to create a common thread among all of the interviewees, and to create an opportunity to replicate in other major media markets. However, the hyperlocal focus of the study could certainly be a limitation – results could be different in different media markets, where election outcomes were different, or in smaller markets where there is less competition. Results could also be varied for national media outlets that have a larger audience, or more pronounced disdain from the current presidential administration.

For future research, it would be valuable to expand this study across the United States into additional media markets, as well as to national and international journalists. In addition, this study would have more validity if the interviews used a double-blind trial to eliminate opportunities of bias.

This study could also be redesigned into a survey, although results would likely not include any personal experiences or narratives, which were valuable to gain context. A survey, however, could be used to gather quantitative data, using Likert scales to measure trust and put more statistical analysis behind the results.

Strategic Communications Implications and Recommendations

In reflection of this research, below are recommendations for strategic communicators and PR practitioners who work closely with the media to create more effectiveness in their role.

Interpersonal relationship management is important.

One of the insights garnered from this paper was that the relationships between PR practitioners and journalists are so valuable and important in disseminating news to the larger public. To maintain a strong, trustworthy relationship, PR practitioners must be helpful and honest when working with journalists, and the best way to build that trust is through interpersonal relationship management.

At times, interactions with journalists become very transactional and a PR practitioner's goal is to fulfill a journalists' request, which means that they don't invest as much time they could getting to know the journalist and what makes them tick. One of the journalists interviewed mentioned that he studies the PR practitioners he works with to learn how to best communicate with them – and meet them where they're at – as a way to fulfill his needs from them. PR practitioners should do the same thing to better serve journalists, while also fulfilling their own goals.

"It's interesting, the relationship between reporters and press people... more old school reporters have this mix of this adversarial, but chummy, relationship. We'll go at it during the day and I'll call you all these names and curse at you, but at the end of the day, we'll go have a few beers and it'll all be fine."

The same respondent, who is a political reporter, also mentioned that he has relationships with PR practitioners that are much more adversarial during the day, but that he'll still go out and have a beer with them at night, and they have more of a chummy relationship in the evenings when they're "off the clock." He claimed that having these more personal relationships helps him get stories done faster, and additionally means that when conversations are more adversarial, he's much more trusting, even if he's not getting the information or answer that he needs. On that same note, he believes that his relationship with PR practitioners actually helps him get more information faster, because they have that chummy relationship outside of work. This hostility between the two can be important, and can help deliver better information to the public, but that doesn't mean the hostility has to extend past regular work hours for both parties.

Based on the conversations with journalists, the researcher recommends that **current PR practitioners should make time to connect with journalists on a more personal level.**

Having coffee or a phone conversation with a reporter without having an agenda or a story idea to pitch is a great way to get to know a reporter. Make the goal of the meeting to get to know them as a person outside of work, but also ask about their working style, and try to understand how you can be helpful in fulfilling those needs. In addition, be sure to share how a journalist can be most helpful to the PR practitioner. Spend this time being straightforward and honest.

Having a beer with someone and getting to know them outside of work seems to be beneficial for both the journalist and the PR practitioner.

"As a reporter, I want to... study how that person communicates, so I know... what is the easiest way for me to get in touch with them? What's the way that I'm gonna get in touch with them that is most likely to elicit a prompt response?"

As mentioned earlier, one respondent described how he takes time to study how a person communicates, such as their responsiveness to text messages and Google's Gchat, and how that process helps him understand how a PR practitioner works and in turn he uses those small details to get the information he needs in a more timely way.

Some PR practitioners do invest time in understanding journalist needs and preferences, but it is not a consistent step in the PR process for all practitioners, which leads the researcher to recommend that **undergraduate programs focusing on Public Relations and Strategic Communication should include more interpersonal communications courses in their curriculum.** Embedding interpersonal communications into curriculums will teach new and upcoming practitioners how to better interact personally with journalists. Strategic communications and public relations programs are often the first time future PR professionals learn best practices for the communications industry, but most curriculums don't expand on interpersonal communications, choosing instead to focus on communicating for an organization or brand to their internal or external audiences. Integrating more interpersonal communication into higher education programs would strengthen this skill for new professionals, and help them learn how to build trust and positive rapport with journalists, which will positively enhance their future careers.

Seek first to understand, then to be understood.

In PR, practitioners are hoping to garner positive coverage for the organization they represent. In journalism, journalists are looking for story ideas or new angles in which to cover a topic, issue or controversy. Usually, interactions between the two parties can be mutually beneficial in fulfilling each others needs. However, as both fields work to achieve their goals,

they can forget that the other has goals, too. To borrow a line from Stephen Covey, it is important to understand someone else first before you expect them to understand you.

As pointed out by one of the respondents, PR and journalism are really two sides of the same coin – both industries need the same skill set. In fact, a few respondents briefly mentioned both PR practitioners and journalists “switching sides” or moving between PR and journalism during their career.

"The skills you are learning will make you valuable in whatever you choose to do."

In the university setting, journalists and PR practitioners are often learning in the same classrooms at the start of their education but once students start to specialize, they can be divided into courses that separate them from each other. Because the roles are so interconnected and interdependent, the researcher also recommends that **journalism and public relations should be taught in tandem at colleges and universities, particularly later in their education as students approach graduation.** Student journalists should take classes from PR practitioners, and PR students should take courses from journalists to better understand how each role works. Perhaps, if student journalists understood what a PR practitioner is trying to accomplish in their role, and if a student focusing in PR understood the factors that impact a journalist, they could both enter the workforce with more opportunities to create successful interactions with the other party.

Organizations are not people.

Large organizations encounter issues and crises regularly, and these can impact the public’s trust in the organization. The same can be said for journalists – when they see an issue or crisis happening at an organization, they could associate their PR practitioner contacts with

the issue and it could negatively impact the relationship between the two. To mitigate that risk, it's important for a PR practitioner to remember that although they represent an organization, they are not the organization. This is an important distinction to make clear while maintaining media relationships.

As one of the respondents mentioned, he often doesn't have issues with PR practitioners, but more so with the people and organizations they work for, so it is important at times for a PR practitioner to remember when to distance themselves, or 'establish their humanness.' This led the researcher to

"I find that PR professionals are doing a good job and the only frustrations I at times have, are with the people that they work for."

recommend that **current PR practitioners should learn when to distance themselves from their organization.** When an organization encounters an issue, the distrust in the institution could trickle down to negatively impact relationships a PR practitioner has built with the media.

This does not mean throwing an organization under the bus in the heat of a crisis, but rather a reminder to be cognizant of how these issues are impacting a PR practitioner's relationships with journalists, and act accordingly in an effort to not damage said relationship. Depending on the situation, this could mean that a PR practitioner should be more straightforward with journalist contacts on what they can expect to deliver, and identifying which things they won't be able to deliver on.

Being responsive and following through, and not ignoring questions or requests could help maintain the rapport that a PR practitioner has established with a journalist. Even a quick 'off-the-record' conversation sharing that a practitioner doesn't have all the answers but that they'll provide them as soon as they are able, or that their organization will not be making

anyone available for an interview but will provide a statement by a specific time, is helpful in maintaining relationships and maintains the trust levels that a PR practitioner has already built with journalists. To help build trust, a PR practitioner's goal should always be to be helpful, even if the end result doesn't benefit them or their organization directly. Also, these conversations remind journalists that the PR practitioner is an individual outside of an organization, and that the practitioner is not the reason this issue is unfolding, mainly that their role is to disseminate and supply information to the media when appropriate.

These recommendations come from conversations the researcher had with journalists, and that is one of the most important takeaways from this study, to connect with journalists on a deeper level than just responding to media requests. By creating more meaningful interpersonal interactions with journalists, PR practitioners have the opportunity to be more successful at their job.

Conclusion

The symbiotic relationship between journalists and PR practitioners is one of the most misunderstood but valuable relationships in strategic communications, and is built heavily on trust. However, trust in this relationship is difficult to define, and can be challenging to maintain. This study interviewed nine Twin Cities journalists to gain their perspectives on trust in the PR practitioner/journalist relationship, and how external factors, such as politics and social media, are impacting their work.

Results showed that journalists work with PR practitioners frequently, and that they have some impact on the content developed by the journalist. Journalists also define trust as honesty, understanding and following through in this relationship, and believe it is important to both give and receive. In addition, the political climate, social media and organizational crises can impact the relationship between a journalist and a PR practitioner.

This study showed that by building mutual trust between the two entities, the agenda building process can be mutually beneficial for both, accomplishing goals for both parties. Recommendations include more defined coursework in public relations and journalism curriculum focusing on interpersonal communication and cross training in both fields.

The relationship between journalists and PR practitioners should continue to be explored as the political climate continues to change. There are many more opportunities for research and examination to make it a productive and collegiate interaction for both PR practitioners and journalists.

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Appendix

Interview Transcripts

Note: Interviews have been edited for length and clarity. Personal identifiable information has been redacted.

Do you work with PR practitioners regularly? If you find a story organically, do you connect with PR practitioners to get interviews/information? If so, what is your normal working relationship? Do they pitch you mostly? Or do you reach out to them first?

1. People like you for instance, I get emails from or I reach out to, because I have a good rapport with that person. To be honest, the greater sum, I'd say maybe 80-85% of them are just kind of individuals who somehow got my email address or my phone number from probably an editorial staff web page, who will then just kind of, I hate to use the term harass, but I mean, you'll get multiple emails from individuals throughout the day. They're like, "Did you see this? Checking back in." There are times where I get a little distant from people, because I just ... when your email gets flooded or your phone is ringing off the hook because constantly people are trying to badger you about something, you kind of push away from those types. Then you gravitate towards the ones who.

Like you, where I have a handful of people I'll turn to [other organizations] for instance, who I know and I trust and we've built up enough of a kind of conversation that I know that they are the person that can help me get to here, where I'm working on this story, or at least pass me off on to the right person. They're kind of looking out for me in the same sense as I'm trying to make sure, I guess in a sense, I'm also looking out for them in the way of putting out the best story I can, the most accurate information I can. I can even give an example if you want me to keep going.

Okay, so I reached to [a state agency]. They put out an employment report, which uses seasonally adjusted figures, which showed essentially that we had lost thousands of jobs, yet somehow our unemployment rate had improved in the State. I understand that it's a seasonal thing, but I wanted to make sure readers would understand it. I ended up reaching out to this guy, who we've spoken many times before and he's gone out of his way to kind of give me a little bit extra on something I was looking for. He was nice enough to kind of listen to what I have to say and then say, "I kind of have an answer for you, but honestly if you want the best possible answer, I'd say you should call this guy. Then he gave me his information, A to B, B to C, I essentially got exactly what I was looking for and it was a great pleasant experience because I had that previous time talking to them.

As a journalist after a while, by the way I didn't feel this way, but after a couple of years now, I've noticed that I like turning to people that I've had a conversation with before. Total strangers are ones that I have a hard time knowing that they're going to essentially work out in the long run. Sometimes there are PR professionals who just have a plan of action that I don't know about. Whether it's just like, we're secretly trying to make you write a puff piece and we're gonna give you ... I have that kind of feeling with... some other companies where they're always trying to spin something and you feel a little wary at times. I'm sure they feel the same way about me when I'm maybe trying to get some intel that they don't really want to give away.
2. I work with them often and more often than not, they're ... I'm reaching out to established relationships or I'm aware of individuals or institutions that have something meaningful to contribute to a story.
3. Often. I try to be as proactive as I can be, and not necessarily wait for stories to come to me, because oftentimes that might look like just your standard case that gets charged and announced publicly, and that's something that everybody will jump on, so I'll try to find ways to build relationships and get interesting additional stories.

4.	<p>I guess I don't too often work with PR people. In previous roles I have. It was a lot of working with people trying to pitch you and stuff. I guess now it's kind of like just how I kind of just do writing and not do reporting, which is just like kind of how do you frame statements that do come from PR folks. When I was reporting in college, I guess I was working with press folks more in a traditional way, I guess.</p>
5.	<p>You know, it's a wide variety of ... how stories evolve, they come from a wide variety of sources, and everybody in our newsroom's job is to come up with story ideas because we're all part of the community, you know, and we all are the eyes and ears of the newsroom.</p> <p>And every day, through email I get pitched stories, but they're usually the result of people that I have met, or I have reached out to in the past. One of my go-to lines on everyone is, "Well, if you ever have story ideas in the future, please contact me." I know I've said that to you.</p> <p>And, so they come from a wide variety of sources, including public relations people, and these days, you know, public relations is ... everybody's PR'd up. Or if there's a spokesperson and, you know, there's usually somebody who speaks for a group kind of thing.</p>
6.	<p>I'd say daily almost during the regular season. In season is a lot more busy than the off season, so right now is the off season so there's not a lot of going on, just in terms of news, in terms of players being around, in terms of what people are interested in even reading right now... there's just not a ton going on. But so I'd say, I haven't talked to them much this off season ever since April/ May when the season ended, but when the season starts, when the season is going, almost a daily thing, I'm at practice, they're there. They're kind of the gatekeepers for the players.</p> <p>After games, you know, same thing, they, the locker room's open but more often than not every player is not in there, it's the PR person saying, "So-and-so, you know, the reporters wanna talk to you tonight, so hang around." and then it's kinda like that. But yeah, so I'd say almost every single day during the regular season.</p> <p>I mean I'm sure every player has representatives or publicists or whatever but in my experience it's all pretty much through the respective teams. It's not like; if you wanna talk to a quarterback one day you go to their publicist instead of the PR of the team, so you're just kinda always work hand in hand with them.</p>
7.	<p>All the time. You know, as a beat reporter, I cover ten offices, or eight reps and two senators, so it's really important for me to have good relationships, as good relationships as are possible with all the press chops for a variety of reasons. If I need to find a congressman for a quick interview, you know ... There's a million reasons, again, to contact these people as you can imagine, from scheduling interviews to background on a story or, "Hey, can you resend that press release from earlier?" Or, "Hey, can you clarify this thing that your boss said?" Or, "Hey, I'm about to run a story that you're not gonna like." All that sort of stuff. So, yeah. I mean, I talk to those people ... I mean, honestly, most days. It's more likely than not, if I'm working on a day, I am talking, either whether it's through Gchat or email, text, phone call, with a congressional press staffer or comms director. I'm actually friends with some of them, in some cases.</p> <p>You know, we'll go get a beer or, you know, just kind of shoot the shit and ... You know, the Hill has its very kind of ... I don't know. It's interesting, the relationship between reporters and press people. Kind of more old school reporters have this mix of this adversarial, but chummy, relationship. We'll go at it during the day and I'll call you all these names and curse at you, but at the end of the day, we'll go have a few beers and it'll all be fine. It's the doing battle kind of day to day of political journalism.</p> <p>I think that's probably something shared, too, by people who work in local media and, you know, I've certainly heard my colleagues whenever I'm in the office, you know, talking to city representatives or the government people and the Capitol and stuff. But, yeah. I guess all of that is to say that, yeah, it's a huge part of the job. It's really relationships based and, yeah, in a lot of cases, how good your relationship is with a press person. You know, how much they trust you, that really affects your ability to get a story done. If they want to work in time for their boss to talk to you or, you know, hustle a little harder to get you a piece</p>

of background, it makes a big difference.

I definitely do engage with press people from non-congressional offices quite a bit. Yeah, that's folks like you, who help set up interviews for me. So, I talk to people at other universities if there's a person there with a specific expertise. Places like the Brookings Institute or various think tanks where they've got somebody who's good on a certain topic and I might need to talk to them. Then, you have sort of the more specific interest group people, like the Boundary Waters folks. They're pretty aggressive in pitching.

They'll always be quick with a quote. Places like... activist-y think tanks are also pretty ... They'll pitch you pretty hard on stuff and they're pretty eager to get their name in ink or online or whatever on whatever you're working on. Yeah, it comes from a lot of places and it's definitely ... Yeah, not a day goes by. A reporter's inboxes is full of press pitches and, at a certain point, it's like, "I don't know how I even get on some of these lists, right?"

8. It goes both ways; there are a certain number of PR professionals who will contact me about a story idea, a client that they are trying to represent who's got an angle to push.

"Hey, we've got this client; we need a big favor ... Would you be willing to sit down with him for just 20 minutes?" It just so happened this client represented a specific industry, and, really, as a favor to a PR practitioner I have a relationship with, I said, "Yes, let's find a time where you can make it work," and I came in before work one day, I met them at their office.

I viewed it as a reciprocal relationship because I had a chance to learn something new about a topic that I didn't know about, meet another contact in an industry where occasionally we do some stories on, and this gave me some broader knowledge, so that's a win for me.

It was a win for this practitioner because he got to tell his client he'd set up an arrangement with a reporter with his client, and the client went one, because he has a chance to sit down and tell his side of the story on some issues that are facing the industry.

So it was a win for all of us, and I walked away with a couple of story ideas that I haven't had a chance to take action on yet, I was going to try to do it last week, but something came up. In that respect, the relationship worked, and it kind of gets back to ... part of the focus of your research is trust, I trusted this PR person because there's already kind of a relationship there, which I think is really important. At the end of the day, this business is no different that any other line of business or category, in that it's built upon relationships, and I think that's very important. It's about relationship building.

I went out, and again, this is another story, but the brand new communications director for a political party has been on the job for not long, and they're trying to get to know the political reporters here in town, and they called me up and said, "Hey, can we get together for coffee?" So we met, again before I went in to work, and they weren't pitching me on any story ideas, but it was a chance for me to get to know them, and them to get to know me, and kind of probing me as to what they think are some of the big communication issues, and I give them a lot of credit, they were being extremely proactive as a communicator, trying to get a lay of the land and get to know the people who they send press releases to, or picks up and makes phone calls to, and they were trying to get to know us on a different basis other than just the voice at the other end of the phone, or the email at the other end of the address. So ... and I think that is important, it's about building relationships, and ultimately that builds trust.

Another PR practitioner called and said, "Let's get together for coffee, I've got some stories that I just want to pitch you." So now, every time when she sends me an email, I always try to be diligent about getting back to her right away with either "Yeah, I can do that, or I can't do that, or yes we're interested, or no we're not interested," because of the relationship that we've kind of built over the years and she knows that we can't do every story that they pitch, but at least there's a relationship there that she knows where I'm coming

	from and I know where she's coming from and that works, and I think that's important.
9.	I would say it really depends on the situation because there would be two different kinds of PR people. You would have the PR person that his job is to pitch me, to pitch a client, to pitch a story and then you have the ones I reach out to for my needs.

How do you typically communicate with PR professionals? (Email, phone, text, tweet, in person, etc.). Do you prefer that? How do you prefer to be pitched?	
1.	[email] Although I don't prefer to. I receive, if anything I'll get the first hit of any conversation usually comes through an email. I more times than likely will give a call and I'm sure you had the experience with that where you might send something to me or I might have a question to you and I typically don't email it to you. I believe I call you more times than any. That's maybe my own personal preference, but I find it's faster and it's more personal. Sometimes people can just get such a robotic response through email and through my time at the U's Journalism school and in Boston as well where I was in journalism school, I learned that it's always in-person interview first, over the phone second, over email third. You always try and work through the ladder that way.
2.	Email or phone calls. I very rarely to never would respond publicly or even privately to social media.
3.	I would say probably, tough to estimate but I would think phone and email for starters, but because a lot of people work close to downtown it's easy to meet in person on some occasions, right? I kinda prefer to do at least once a week or every other week.
4.	It is mostly email just because it's like, "Hey, I need something on the record." Before that, I would say it was a pretty even split, 50/50 email and phone. I don't care, as long as it's like I can come to I guess a reasonably quick response. As long as people are communicative, it's like I'll do the same. I don't really have a preference, medium.
5.	Usually the first time, I would meet them in person or call, and then, in the future, after that relationship is established, then, it's usually email, you know. And so, you know, I would say email probably is the most common way that we communicate once a relationship is established. And one other thing to add to that, by the way. You got to remember, we're also working on hard deadlines throughout the day, and so, very often, it's phone too. I will do both. If I'm trying to reach somebody ... if I'm jumping up and down and going, "Please notice me, I need your help!" I will call, and then I will follow it up with an email. I think if there's no sense of urgency, email is just fine. People are even starting to use Facebook messenger, which I don't appreciate as much, but if it's a sense of urgency to it at all, and, again, I believe in relationships, and if there's a PR person that I trust and they call me up and say, "Hey, you should probably know about this," or, "You guys should probably be over here," or, if it's like a PR person for a law enforcement agency, or a government agency, or I'm just trying to think of, is it, "Hey, there's something big going on," and then I'm always just grateful of the phone call, you know.
6.	It's mostly just in person 'cause if there's a practice and as a reporter I'm gonna be there. Just to make sure things are happening you don't wanna miss something. At every practice someone's there. There are occasions where some team is on the road and you're not, there are emails, there's text, but I'd say 95% of the stuff is just in person with them.
7.	I do text with people sometimes, too, because everyone at Washington ... I mean, obviously everywhere, but Washington people have like five phones. You get coffee with them and they'll put all their phones on the table like it's a status thing. Yeah. Phone is interesting. I think it sort of sometimes depends ... You know, as a reporter, I want to kind of study how that person communicates, so I know, as I'm sure they do me, what is the easiest way for me to get in touch with them? What's the way that I'm gonna get in touch with them that is most likely to elicit a prompt response because, in most cases, it's relatively time sensitive. Yeah, sometimes I'll call somebody if I really want them fast. You know, there are people who I Gchat who I know are on Gchat a lot and who will respond to me

	<p>pretty quickly.</p> <p>There's certain press people who I know are really good about emails and I'll email them. I mean, phone is sort of an old school thing and some people ... Kind of the older guard of people will ... They're big on phone. Even, there's a younger guy, who's a press person in an office. He always calls and it's sort of a ... I think it actually makes him a little more effective. I pick up the phone always. You never know whose calling. It works for him and he'll talk to just kind of shoot the breeze. He'll talk to pitch. You know whatever. I can ignore an email. You know, as a reporter, like I said, I get a million pitches from all over the place, but from people I know and people I don't, and I don't respond to most of them just because they're not for me or I don't know the person, but when you're on the phone with somebody and they're pitching you, you've gotta come up with a pretty good reason, either why you're kind of brushing them off or you're not interested or something like that. It's surprising that more people don't use phone. I guess there's a reason why people did it and now there's so many ways to get in touch with people that you can sort of not.</p>
8.	<p>It's mostly email, but for those people who I know, I absolutely don't mind a phone call. In this electronic age it's more efficient to send an email, or every now and then they will send me a text, and I'm not the biggest texter in the world because I've got fat fingers. Especially among those who you have a relationship with, texting works.</p> <p>Everyone does email. The danger with email is that, a lot of times, depending on how you're sending out that email, if you're sending it out on a big blast, it tends to get caught in spam filters and since the Sony Pictures hack a couple of years ago, our network has just really ratcheted up its email security, and so I would say easily probably half of the blast emails that are sent our ways I never get because it gets caught in a spam filter, and we don't get them until the next day. That's an issue so a lot of times what I do, especially for those people whom I trust, I give my personal email address and have them send stuff to me that way, and that's what I do.</p> <p>So, for all of my good contacts, I give them my personal email because that way, when they're sending me something it pings in my phone right away, and I get it.</p> <p>I'm just not always around a computer all the time to see email, but if they send it on my email account, I get it almost instantly. That works to my advantage, but I don't share that email with everyone, only the sources whom I know are not going to blast me 10 times a day with stuff. Email is absolutely the best way to get a hold of people, and it's the most efficient if you're trying to get a hold of a lot of people at once, especially with something that's breaking or developing.</p>
9.	<p>For the people that are pitching me, it's all done by email nowadays. I just send it right to my voicemail; I don't answer my desk phone. I don't answer my phone and I just say on my message, "Send me an email, don't bother trying to get a hold of me by phone."</p> <p>And then on the other end, I'm only calling a media relations or PR person if there's news. So, whatever that situation would be, if there's some story that they're involved with and I want them to come on, I'm calling them. And what I would say, well, we were just having this discussion the other day, the way that that's really evolved over the last few years is that the control on that has become so much tighter.</p> <p>As you know in your job, 10 years ago I would've just called the professor and I would've gotten a professor on, or maybe 10 years ago I would've had an email, if I was really lucky, but for the most part, I would've looked him up in the phone book or called them in their office and tried to get a hold of them. There was no intermediary. And now, of course, like the U and all of these companies have strict controls over it. They want to be involved; they want to make sure that they know what's going on and who's talking and what they're talking about, and all of those.</p> <p>And then on the other end, I'm only calling a media relations or PR person if there's news. So, whatever that situation would be, if there's some story that they're involved with and I want them to come on, I'm calling them. And what I would say, well, we were just having this discussion the other day, the way that that's</p>

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I think a lot of that is social media in the way stories can blow up, but it was heading that way long before that. It's just that ... Maybe it's because people become easier to get a hold of, or ... you know, and I didn't have a ton of experience with the U 15 years ago, when I started, but, like I said, when I did reach out to him, I called him directly.

If you were to provide a percentage, how often do PR practitioners play a role in the stories you produce?	
1.	<p>Yeah, I'd say maybe about 50, because it's not always PR professionals. It can be someone, if I need a legal opinion, I don't really end up getting, I maybe talk to the operator who points me to a legal professional in that specific field of law, so that's not I would say, quite a PR practitioner. In that case, yeah, probably less than 50% of the time. I'd say that's probably from my experience, not just myself but other people in the field, the journalism field, that might be about the case, because PR practitioners only work I think more in kind of a corporate field. For instance, if I look ... our staff writer. If he's doing a story on real estate, he's talking to real estate developers. He's not so much talking to the spokesperson for that real estate company all the time.</p> <p>That comes with experience in the field. I think early on it was probably more, because I didn't have direct connections to companies, but as you build up that relationship with various places, you have like a ... I have phone numbers to a handful of CEOs, if I need to get an opinion. I don't have to go through the PR office to get to them essentially.</p>
2.	<p>More than half. Sending background or connecting, I think the real key thing, and you understand this role extremely well is connecting people with key individuals and finding out who they are and connecting me with them. At times, it's quite clear who it's appropriate to talk to, and sometimes it's not. That's also the case when you and I are doing a project together. Identifying the most meaningful individuals and connecting me with them, and then of course background information.</p>
3.	<p>It probably would be a fairly high percentage if you take into account the attempt to include perspective from a PIO. Even if it's something that they can't comment on, there's always that attempt to include that in a story as well. And some context around why, in the case of a no comment, a little bit of context around why that's the case, you know, if it's pending litigation, or ongoing investigation.</p>
4.	<p>Maybe a third. A third that I would say are sourced either on background or just for every business story or something like that ends up having like a spokesperson.</p>
5.	<p>Well, again, I think it's your definition of a PR person. I'm just thinking back of stories ... you know, very often, like with non-profits, the PR person is the executive director, you know. Or if it's with a smaller community, you're talking to the mayor, or the police chief, so I would say it's pretty high. When I'm dealing with somebody who I consider to be a professional communicator, you know, I'd say 50. You know? I mean all reporters like to farm up their own stories. And you do that through sources with generally our PR people, you know. Sometimes we know about things before PR people know about them, you know. But I would say 50's probably pretty accurate, where either somebody has pitched it to me, or I'm making a call trying to get someone's attention for help, and then I end up with a PR person, you know.</p>
6.	<p>I'd say almost every single day during the regular season.</p>
7.	<p>I'm trying to think of a story where I did not need to reach out to somebody to help with something. Honestly, I would say it's pretty limited to breaking news and that's something we really don't do a whole of.</p>

	<p>I mean, there's like 95% of my stories I am in contact in some way with a press person, for an office or an organization of some kind. Even with breaking news, a lot of my job is standing around in the Capitol and trying to get one of the reps to talk to me, and in a breaking news situation ... I guess the best example, the last one, was when the House passed their Obamacare replacement. I basically am around there trying to catch whoever I can to get a quick quote, but in that situation, it was important for me to get quotes from the Republicans and I can't be in three places at once. You know, I might catch Tom Emmer, but I miss Erik Paulsen or Jason Lewis or somebody like that and then I have to call their press person and be like, "Hey, can I get a quote or can you set something up or kind of that or the other thing?"</p> <p>So, it's pretty rare, even in a breaking news situation, where I get everything I need just by being on the ground. In event coverage, sometimes. I do a story on the State of the Union every year. I don't need to talk to anybody for that, pretty much. Other than, sometimes I need to be like, "Hey, I missed you," afterwards. So, I'm not really proving my point here well. The point is, yeah, for the vast majority of stories, I'm talking to somebody.</p>
8.	<p>Well you have to understand that we're trying to the most accessible version of the truth every day, and sometimes going through the comms people is a barrier, it's one more step in the process where I have all 400 people there, I just go knock on their door and go around them. It's not to say that I don't like them, I don't respect them, sometimes it's just easier to go to the person that you need to get a quote from directly. Other times ... Again, it's situational.</p> <p>If I need something from the Speaker, "Hey, the Governor said this, what's the Speaker ... ", and I'll go directly to the House GOP and the comms people there and just say, "Hey we need to get a hold of the Speaker, check his schedule, or how's the Speaker reacting to this today?" So it's really situational, it really is and I hate to say it but I'm not a big believer in sending out statements. I'm in the medium of television; I need somebody's face on camera.</p> <p>Granted, we do it, especially under deadline. I hate to do it because it's more credible for the person and for us to get their mug on camera, and to hear them saying ... I think statements are a cop out. Under deadline pressure, absolutely, you send out a statement, but otherwise it's also a cheap and lazy and easy way to avoid accountability, especially with the press. You control your own message that way and no one gets to ask you any follow up questions and just say, "What do you mean by this?" or "No, that's not what you said last week."</p> <p>From a comms director point of view, statements are an easy way to control your message, journalists hate them.</p>
9.	<p>I could go half, easily. It's one of those ones that depends on if it's just somebody that's in the newspaper, somebody that did something, you know, and I'm just reaching out to them directly.</p> <p>50%, depending on the day, it might be 25% and some days it's 75%, so I think you're safe to say it's easily half.</p>

Some public relations practitioners will fully package stories – including photos, video, fact sheets, press releases, etc. Is this something you prefer? Or do you like to create your own content? Do you think that is because of the shrinking newsroom?

1.	<p>I think most people would say that they would want it all buttoned up. That's even just for people who might only write a story or two a week, who have that flexibility, like a structure like a reporter for instance, who's on this very, very specific beat, who can then take the time and get a larger depth of information to add to that story. Where a guy like me who might churn out anywhere from two to four stories a day on average, I like a little bit more buttoned up, but also because that can make or break whether or not I even want to write that story.</p>
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	<p>Let's say I have time to write three stories in a day, but I have four options to choose from. The one that has, let's say it's like two different ones are both renderings, you know like the announcement today, the new office building that's gonna be built and it's gonna be tens of millions of dollars spent on each one. They both work in the same field, maybe they'll hire the same amount of people, but if one has renderings of what that office will look like maybe on the outside and the inside and the other one doesn't, both providing about the same information, I'll write the one that has the renderings more times than anything, because as we especially have redone our whole website look and shifted it all towards mobile, it's very image heavy. I like to also plug those images into anything social media-wise that we do, so the shareability of that story plays a huge factor in visual shareability that is whether or not I will actually write that story at times.</p> <p>(Do you think this is due to the newsroom shrinking trend?)</p> <p>I think it still helps, at least in my case, to have everything packaged because it's not just those stories that I'm writing during the day. Often times, especially as we ... It's probably not news to you that money in the field of journalism has kind of been on the shrink lately because just advertisers shifting their funds elsewhere. Especially for us going forward, I'm gonna be writing probably a feature story every month, so that time outside of writing the daily stories is gonna go towards in-depth reporting. For something that can be more simply packaged and easy for me to just kind of churn out to the masses, it allows me to spend more time on the things that I want to delve deep into. More kind of hot button issues and stuff like that.</p>
2.	Helpful, I think the more the better. Understanding that what we use ultimately will remain up to my editor and myself.
3.	N/A
4.	I would say the only useful thing for me is photos or renderings or things that we could otherwise ... If it's something like if it's an interview or if it's a video or an audio recording, basically, which to me is like an interview or reporting that someone else has done for you, I never really have much use for that type of thing. It's a rare circumstance where it's like, "Oh, I think we should publish this video that we were supplied with." We've definitely done the like, "Oh, we're going to republish this Red Bull thing because it's kind of crazy and it'll get clicks," or something like that. Or evidence from like a squat car video camera or something like that. Yeah, definitely the most useful thing is pictures.
5.	<p>That would depend on the subject matter. You know, my old ... the last station I was at, we had a policy where we never used video that wasn't our own. Here... it's a little different, because here's why: because very often, there's a good chance that you have put that video out on social media already, and we use stuff on social media all the time, you know. And part of it is the pressure to fill content and the news cycle, and just to share things with our viewers.</p> <p>But that would have to depend on the source it's coming from. For example, still photographs, we use for social media and websites. If it's a performance or something in an area where the public's not permitted, in some lab where they're super-worried about germs and quality and stuff like that, then yeah, we would probably use it if it was packaged like that.</p> <p>But we would use it ... put it this way, we would very rarely use it if it came with conditions. Like, you must use it in its entirety, or you can't re-edit it, that kind of thing. And then that would be done on a case by case basis, I think.</p>
6.	N/A
7.	<p>Yeah, it kind of depends on where it's coming from. If it's somebody I don't know and it's a topic that I may not know as much about, I think having that additional information helps me to decide whether it's a story. I mean, if they include information that's relevant to it or relevant in helping me decide what is and what isn't a story or what is and what isn't worth looking into.</p> <p>That stuff can help, for sure. I don't know if I use the information ever in my stories, but they definitely help me decide whether this pitch is worth looking into. It's rare to get a pitch these days that doesn't have at</p>

	<p>least some of kind of what you mentioned.</p> <p>Unless it's from somebody I know and it's super informal and they're like, "Hey, we've got a bill coming next week. Do you want the summary or this, that?" Kind of thing. Which is sort of the kind of communication you might have with somebody who you know better and they have a chance to be more informal and know that I'll probably respond to them one way or the other, as opposed to if you're kind of pitching me out of the blue, or pitching to a reporter out of the blue, you gotta get their attention somehow or you've gotta try to get their attention.</p> <p>So, you put as much information out there as you can, which I definitely get. Yeah, I would say that it can help and then there's some times where it's like, "Oh, my god. You sent me five or six attachments and I'm just gonna look at this later."</p>
8.	<p>VNRs (Video News Releases) are very touchy because, as a matter of policy at my station, we're not allowed to use any VNR video in our stories unless we have permission, and, obviously, if somebody's sending you to it, they want it on the air, but we also have to disclose to our viewers that it is VNR video or video provided to us by a certain source, the company, the campaign, whatever, and we have to disclose that.</p> <p>We got tagged by the FCC awhile back from our national feed that had some VNR video in it that was not disclosed, and we got fined by the FCC. So we are very hypersensitive about that at our shop right now.</p> <p>Here's kinda the exception. I'm gonna use an energy company for example, they have huge wind farms in SW Minnesota, so if we're doing a story on wind energy, and the CEO was at the capital here this winter, and we did a story on they're jumping ahead to add more wind in their power grid because, as he describes it, "Wind is on sale." We're four hours away from the nearest wind farm to get some video of wind turbines, so what we did in that case is I got video from them, because they have some stock footage. Now, that's not a VNR, because it's not something produced with some kind of announcer's track on it, so it's not a company video, but it is stock video of their wind farms that we were able to use, and I fully disclose it in my piece that "This video provided by the company," or we had the chyron up in the corner that said "Video provided by the company," so that our audience knew it.</p> <p>In those cases, prepackaged video is very helpful to us because, based upon deadline pressures or whatever; we're not able to get that video. So, in that instance, it is helpful. As a journalist, I always like a sheet of just basic facts if you're having a news conference, give me some of the basic facts behind it so I can refer to, especially people's names and positions. Especially if it's at a news conference, I want to know the correct spelling of each person's name and what they do, so that becomes very helpful, that's where the comms person or the PR person needs to help the journalists do their jobs.</p>
9.	<p>Well, in what I do as a talk radio producer that is not helpful for me. I need a live guest. I need a human being to come on and talk about ... Now, if it's just some survey WalletHub does, "The top 10 places to get a pickle," or whatever, I might just read that story. So in that sense, they send me the story and the list, or whatever, and we're just going to take that information and put it on the air, in that sense, it would be helpful. I know, we don't do it, but like TV other radio stations around the country would be ... Like, when we have a book author on, they send us a cover of the book and a head shot. We don't do that.</p> <p>But I know other stations that will take that and repurpose it into putting it up with a story, or a write-up, or something on their website. So for them it would be helpful, for me it's not, but that doesn't mean it's not in radio overall. But yeah, any extra stuff, like video and stuff like that, isn't going to be helpful.</p> <p>Like, what is helpful, as far as packaging, is if they have talking points. One of the ones that never ceases to amaze me, is the number of PR people who pitch me, and the say, "Hey, we can talk about this story, the Healthcare Bill today," or even something more generic that isn't in the news, and they'll be like, "Hey, we can talk about real estate insurance in the Twin Cities." And you're like, "All right, I'll do that." And then they write back to me and go, "Okay, what would you like to ask them?" And I'm always like, "You pitched me.</p>

You have the expert. You tell me what you want me to ask your expert so that your expert looks intelligent."

The number of PR people that are just like, "What would you like to ask my client?" Its like, "Yeah, that's not how this works. What does your client have to offer me?" And I don't know what your person can tell me. I don't know your person. You know, unless it's like, if it's the U or someone says, "Hey, this professor can talk about the healthcare bills, but I can tell you, we're interested in finding out what was in the Senate's plan today, and is it going to get passed?" Or whatever. But if it's something I don't know anything about, and you're telling me you have an expert to come on, the expectation that I know what to ask him, you tell me what to ask him. I don't know. What does he know? Tell me know what he knows so I can ask him about it.

That one always trips me up. I'm just always like, you know. And the people that ... PR people, a lot of time, will be, "Could you send me a list of questions?" I don't know if they're new, or that, but I mean, you know from doing this for so long. First off, we don't plan that far ahead and second off, journalists never tell you what they're going to ask you. I mean, that's what they teach you, as you know, at the school there, is you don't tell them what you're going to ask them, or for preapproval of questions.

If it might be, like, "I want to know, on the care study today, why was Minneapolis number four? What needs to be improved?" Or I'm like, "I want specific data about Minneapolis," I might be able to tell you that, but I'm not going to write out 10 questions. And, I think that PR people, I haven't been on that side, so I don't know what their day is like, I should probably take time to find out. But I'm working, as you know, on deadline.

I don't have time to ... I'm not a reporter who's working on one story today. I have three hours of talk radio, which is, you know, 6 to 12 segments, depending on how many guests we want to do. I don't have that much time to sit down and think about each one and write it all out, you know. If ... I have three producers on the show, then we can do that, but it's just me. And a lot of days I'm doing two shows, so.

Do you find the relationship between PR practitioners and journalists to be adversarial or hostile? If so, why? Share examples. Is it changing over time?	
1.	<p>Yeah, I think it's gotten a little bit better. It's a total case by case basis though to be honest with you. There are people I've had a smooth relationship with for my entire time speaking with them. There's others at places, just a few healthcare companies and especially at [retailers] ... has been one that I've got phone calls and they've been just like cursing at me. It's one where you know, you have to just play the passive person. You can't say anything to antagonize them. I guess in their eyes, I've antagonized them to start off with, because maybe I've written something critical about their company. That is what happened with [this company], where they put out a quarterly release. I did a comparison to [other retailers] and said, by current analysis; these guys are not up to snuff. They might be in some trouble down the road against their competitors. Yeah, that resulted in them essentially just lashing out.</p> <p>That doesn't help build a good rapport, because now that's where I have a hesitancy to even want to reach out to them, because they're gonna, who's to say they're not just gonna be that way again and again and again? I think it just totally depends. If you're not everyone's favorite guy, it can be a pretty hostile relationship. Otherwise, I'm not doing hard hitting investigative reporting on a daily basis, so I guess I don't deal with that too much.</p>
2.	<p>I think in general I do not. In fact, conversely find it collegial and cooperative. On the rare occasion that it isn't, then something has gone wrong. You use the term PR professional, and a true professional will be cognizant that they're there to facilitate dialogue, but not to direct expressions that we ultimately have and you know the professionals like yourself and others clearly understand those boundaries. I don't find it overly adversarial.</p>
3.	<p>No, not in my experience. I also come at it from a position of covering it daily, and being one of the only people who cover this topic on a daily basis and not just ... because what will happen often is that you'll</p>

	<p>have a high profile case or some something going on and media from all over the Twin Cities will cover it, but these are people oftentimes that'll be covering a shooting the next day, or a tornado, or concerts, so being able to be that person on the ground every day allows me to tell sources that, you know, "Listen, if you have a problem with any of my reporting, we can talk about it and if I have a problem with you we can have a good discussion."</p>
4.	<p>It definitely depends, like I've had relationships with both. Kind of like you smile through grit teeth or something like that. It's been very different experiences... It was always the first thing, you'd build up a rapport with someone and it would be good. I guess I think businesses tend to have some of the stuff where it's like I have no relationship with them and they're very clearly trying to sell a product and not an idea or something.</p> <p>I think the only times where it's been particularly hostile is just when it comes to like public data requests. I feel like, in my experience, I've been like almost intentionally misunderstood for the sake of the data request being less complete. It's like we make our requests as ... I always try to make my request as specific as possible and the response is generally like we're going to take all the time we have and we're going to answer this as narrowly as we possibly could, even when it's pretty clear what you're trying to get at. It's always like I know what you can say and I would like for you to just be forthcoming with me, if it's like you're trying to get a statement on something, but yeah. Public data's where I have the biggest issues. I've had one pleasurable experience with a public data request.</p>
5.	<p>No, I do not, but again, I believe in relationships, and I believe if we have a trusting relationship, that you will trust me to tell the stories that are perceived as being positive news and you would trust me to tell the stories that are received as negative news. And I would hope that there could be an off-the-record conversation about what's actually happening, and the trust is that that information would not be for air, but would help with background, and that again, is a case-by-case basis.</p> <p>... We're doing our own thing, and that's the thing a PR person has to understand is that we don't just take a PR person's word as gold, because you've got an agenda. Now, while some PR people think the media has an agenda, I will tell you, I have never worked in a newsroom where there is quote, an agenda.</p> <p>And so, what I'm trying to say is that all we want to do is find out the story, accurately, and so, there are companies who, they all take different viewpoints on public relations, and some PR people, I don't trust as far as I can throw a stick. And it's just because I know that they are not willing to share jack squat because they're so protective.</p> <p>[Public institutions end to be] very open. Part of that is it's also owned by taxpayers. You are subject to different rules than private companies, and ... but, [some private companies] oh, my God, they're awful. And they're just buttoned up and they're controlling. I've been in there and it's like, "Okay, here's what we want ... here, what are you going to talk to them about? What, do we want to know ahead of time?" And, "Here's where we'd like you to take pictures," and [other private companies, like retailers] on the other hand, literally has an open door. You could show up at any Target store, anytime and talk to the manager, come on in. But when it gets to corporate stuff, and maybe stuff to do with shareholders and stock price, then it gets a little more tightened up because it has to be, you know, that's private information there.</p> <p>So every company ... and it's true with different universities, it's true with law enforcement. Every company is just a little different in how they approach it, and so if I'm dealing with a bigger company who I don't necessarily have personal relationships with, then I know, going in, I got to try and soften things up here or just to try and get some information and get some cooperation.</p>
6.	<p>My coverage and how I cover whatever I'm covering has no bearing on if I'm worried that the PR people are gonna get mad at me about it, but they know like we have, it's a very like, it's an understanding that they're helping us out and we're helping them out by giving them coverage so they know it's not always gonna be if the teams loses a 100 to zero you're not gonna write nice things about 'em.</p>

	<p>So it's kind of, it's a working relationship and they know that at the end of the day, their job, and if they're doing it well, is gonna reflect well on the team, whether it sometimes I'll say "negative coverage" if you know the team's not performing very well, but at the end of the day there still getting covered. So I think that's, that's what they kinda realize as a PR staff 'cause if you stop giving us access then we stop covering you then who's covering you, you know, so it's a very, I guess, understanding relationship on both ends and kinda from my perspective too.</p> <p>If I ask for someone they're not always gonna give me that person to interview, which isn't always helpful to me but it's kind of a push, pull.</p>
7.	<p>It's a thing that I think about a lot and it's honestly ... I guess I'll preface this by saying, at least there's a Washington culture of different ... I think there's a Washington culture that may differ from a place ... For example, in New York City, I know people who work on both sides of the press and PR divide in that city and it's a very confrontational, adversarial relationship and I don't know if those people go out for beers after work. I frankly doubt it. This is sort of a non-sequitur, but this guy who's formerly a communications director, he went on to be ... He's currently the communications director for a [mayor]... is sort of kind of loathed by the [metro area] press.... These guys are just constantly Tweeting just kind of really snarky stuff ... and this guy... has to go on Twitter and just sort of push ... He pushes back against them constantly and they have such an acrimonious relationship. Again, it's online, but I just can't imagine them ever getting together after work. I guess all this is to say I think Washington does have this culture of ... I do think that press people and PR people are more ... Not that they're playing for the same team or they do the same thing, but that they have to have more of a harmonious relationship. I don't know. Maybe it's just sort of the chummy culture of Washington sometimes can be a factor. When you ... I don't have a lot of coworkers. I don't have any coworkers in Washington. All my coworkers are in Minnesota.</p> <p>So, with press people, sometimes it's like, "Oh, I work with you?" We don't work together, really, but I talk to some of them so much that it's like you're a regular part of my work landscape.</p> <p>So, it's more than like, "Oh, yeah. I have to talk to them sometimes for work." So, it kind of makes things a little complicated, but I think kind of back to the substance of your question, I think it's situational, really what the nature of our relationship is like and I've had arguments with and great conversations with press people on both sides of the aisle and it really depends on what you're working on because, as you know, in the ideal situation, I'm writing about something. Somebody's boss wants to be in that story because that helps advance their agenda. The press person is tasked with making sure that I have all the information I have. I have an interview and am I writing to get their point across. They appear the way they want to appear in the press. I get my work done. Everybody goes home happy.</p> <p>So, in that sense, yeah. I mean, a lot of times, my talks and my contact with press people is really, really positive and it's very much like a, "Let me help you get what you need" kind of relationship and in a lot of situations, that's the way it is. Yeah, it can be really adversarial, where it's like I'm writing about something that you're not gonna like or I write a headline that makes your boss look bad or I write about something that makes your boss look bad and then, you know, that's when you get into more argumentative territory and combative territory, but even when I've had more combative conversations with press people, it's always ... It's not like that irreparably damages our ability to work together and next time something comes around where I'm trying to get their boss in an article and that's something they want to talk about, everything works fine.</p> <p>So, it's really, really situational.</p> <p>(regarding giving a heads up regarding an upcoming negative story) You know, if they've been cooperative in getting me what I need and it's like, "Well, they said something" and they're gonna look bad ... I mean, there is a professional courtesy aspect of it and I think that is expected in Washington, at least in that environment of the Capitol, where, yeah, you're writing something</p>

	<p>about someone's boss, you say, "Hey, this may not be exactly what you want." But, you're gonna have an argument about it anyway, you know? It comes out and then you argue about it. You could argue about it before or after. Sometimes, it's easier for me to be like, "Well, it's already published, so I'm not gonna change it if we have this conversation before or after publishing. I'm not gonna change it."</p> <p>You never know kind of what the motivations are on the other side. I do think that, in a lot of these Capitol Hill offices, the ... It's an intense environment, depending on who the boss is, there might be a really strong pressure to make sure they're happy, appease them, whatever it may be, and they might just be kind of calling to say, "Oh, they called the reporter and argued about the headline with them for 20 minutes and, you know, they might not do anything about it, but I went to bat for you."</p> <p>You know, both of us kind of expecting that I'm not gonna change anything and that even what they asked me to change wasn't really all that monumental, but ...</p>
8.	<p>It depends on what the situation is. If you've got a PR person who doesn't return your phone calls, who is trying to cover for the person you're trying to get a hold of, whether it's the Mayor or the Governor or whatever, yes that can quickly spin into an adversarial relationship.</p> <p>If you've got a comms person who is up front and is saying, "Look, I know you need something from the Mayor today, and she's aware that you're trying to get a hold of her, here's why I can't get her to you by 3:00 this afternoon." I think being up front is better than trying to hide.</p> <p>Someone that doesn't grant any media interviews create a hostile relationship between the media and them. It depends upon some of the personalities you're dealing with, and how effective they are at being communicators. If you've got somebody in a PR role or Comms Director role who's a lousy interpersonal communicator, you're not doing your client or those you're serving any favors, and if you're not a good communicator yourself, then you're going to be woefully inadequate for the person you're representing.</p>
9.	<p>I would say, for the most part, in what I do, it is not hostile, because I have something that they want. In the sense that ... Now, like in TV, if I'm calling to get the U's president on to find out why you're not spending money in the right way, right?</p> <p>In those situations, it can be hostile, because you're put in the position of trying to block me. You have to run interference. The president doesn't want to come on, but he doesn't want to say he doesn't want to come on, because that looks bad. So, he has to say, you know, there has to be scheduling conflicts, or whatever. It's the dance of, "Oh, well, we can't do it right now, maybe another time." And then the other time he doesn't want to do it either, and all of that. And so, if it's a... flat out a news story or news topic, there could be adversarial in the sense that I want something that they don't want to give me.</p> <p>Some PR people are very adversarial because it's, you know, we want their person to come one and explain why they're doing whatever to us and they absolutely will refuse to. But, in any of the cases, like where they're pitching me a story, or trying to sell me on something, in that case, they can't be adversarial with me, because they want something from me.</p> <p>Yes, in the news sense, it certainly can be. But only negative news, obviously never in anything positive. And then never when they're trying to sell me something. In that sense, it's more, it isn't adversarial ... Maybe they feel adversarial to me because they want to come out and they think their thing's great and I won't put them on, but they certainly would never tell me that or let me know that, because they don't want me holding it against them.</p>

How would you define trust? Do you trust the PR practitioners you work with? What makes you trust/not trust them? What qualities do practitioners have that helps you trust them?	
1.	For me it's following through. If I talk to someone and they say, "Hey, I can get this bit of information, maybe it's like a statistic I'm looking for and especially when they across and they'll say, "That shouldn't be a

	<p>problem at all. I'll give it to you by noon. If anything comes up I'll let you know." Then there are many cases where that happens and then I don't hear back from them until four, they're just totally unresponsive on email or phone. Then they'll just say, "Sorry, I couldn't get it."</p> <p>It almost seems like they've been ignoring you or something. That's where I lose trust, is when I feel like people instill a sense a confidence in the situation and then they disappear. It's almost like a bad relationship. It's like if you're gonna go pick up your date for the first date or something like that and then they weren't even at their house. You're kinda like, "What's going on? I'm here you know?" Then you start to question everything and then they might show up and then you're like, "Well, it's not about, the evening's off to a weird start." That's kind of how that trust gets a little shaky early on.</p> <p>Obviously, you want to trust that what they're giving you is true. If it isn't, there's a problem there, but I haven't really had instances ... or maybe even any instances where I can point to that someone had just blatantly given me false information, because I don't see why an organization would do that.</p> <p>I guess when I just look at my history of bad experiences with PR practitioners, it's typically been that, or getting in a weird shouting match with someone because they are upset at what you've written. More times than any, people have followed through. For me there's a clear line. Either their doing their job really well and you're friendly with them and there's never really much of a problem, or they're just totally in your face like I said, constantly berating you with emails and phone calls or just, I don't know, just not nice. Like I said, kinda like out on a mission. It's hard to explain, I've just instinctively almost picked up on certain people who they're from the same organization that will always reach out to me with the latest thing, I think sometimes people feel like news organizations are just meant to be like king of outlets for their every little good deed that they've done- That's not always the case.</p>
2.	<p>Professionalism. In that PR professionals need to understand the role and the responsibilities that journalists have and how they go about their work. Additionally, journalists need to understand that PR professionals have roles and responsibilities and to respect that as well. As long as there are those generalized, you know, guidelines, then I think the trust can often be established and mutually beneficial.</p>
3.	<p>Yeah, now understand that we have different jobs and motivations, but at the end of the day I think it boils down just honesty. There's always gonna be situations when somebody's not gonna want to tell me all that I want them to tell me, but at the same time I don't want anyone to be misleading or dishonest, and I think that's probably at the root of it.</p> <p>Again, it's within a context of knowing that there is a strategy behind dealing with media, and I conversely am looking for information oftentimes that certain people don't want to give me, so there's a level of trust that I have with my sources and that I trust enough not to outright lie or mislead me, but I do understand that sometimes there'll be information that I'll have to find other means to acquire.</p>
4.	<p>Trust is just that there's a reasonable understanding of care and respect for what the other side is doing, I think. Just basically that I know if somebody can't talk about something or won't or if you want to, of course, be doing your job well and spinning that information or trying to reflect that news in a good light, like I get that. Just basically somebody who's going to be as forthcoming as possible with me and I'll do the same for them. Like I'm going to tell people what I'm going to write ... Just basically that I can trust you to give me something accurate. And just talk to me like a person, not like an enemy.</p> <p>I think it's the same thing when you're working with any other source of information. It's like if it doesn't seem like just outwardly crazy, like sometimes... with that but I think it's just like a trust but verify is a good rule of thumb for pretty much anything that you're dealing with, that's going to play a part in your story. Of course, if I feel like somebody's being ultimately antagonistic or has kind of left me feeling duped before, then I'm inclined to move away from the trust but verify.</p>
5.	<p>That we trust each other the exchange of information and the understanding of what it will be used for. There's one thing to understand ... to be quite honest with you, we don't want to be chasing down stuff that's not newsworthy, or not a story. And if there's a PR person that I trust, that tells me there's really</p>

	<p>nothing here, like I can't tell you how many times, even with law enforcement agencies, police department PIO's who are trained PR people, and it's like, "Okay," and I'll just say to them, "Okay, we're thinking about blowing up our whole plan and moving crews around. Should we be doing this?" And if I trust that person and they tell me, "Yeah, you probably should," then that's all I need to know to move crews and to get into place, or if they say, "No, there's really nothing here." Then, it's, "Okay, thank you." I trust that we're not going to be burned and this is going to show up somewhere else. But on the other hand, if that trust is violated once, then it's all gone.</p> <p>It's just like personal relationships, right? And you just can't give that trust out to anyone, because the PR person is also doing their job when they build these relationships with media. Because a PR person's job is to manage the media, and one way you do that is through relationships and that, so that would be ... that's a long ... that's not one word.</p> <p>But with all this crap going on in Washington with these leaks, it is crazy. I've never seen anything like it. There's always, always been leaks. Always. And you know, you hear anonymous sources. Well, that's a red flag, because part of it is there's so many political agendas in Washington, you know. So that's my definition of trust, the willingness to share information and trust that it'll be used for the right purpose.</p> <p>It is a feel, because my reputation is on the line, your reputation is on the line, and ... but if I trust you, like if somebody was to tell me something just to give me context and perspective, and say this can't end up in your story, but here's a starting point for you, you know. And I can't be the source of that. Then that's a very special thing, and that doesn't happen a whole lot.</p>
6.	<p>Yeah, I mean mostly being helpful, I don't know like, so I'm gonna be there and I know it's my job but it's still takes up my time to be there and it's just really helpful and it varies from team to team, from sport to sport, but some PR staff can just be incredibly unhelpful and take their job too seriously but really I think they lose sight of what their job is and they're just, they're whole goal is to limit access, to not, to not let you basically do your job, to make your job as difficult as possible.</p> <p>And that's what makes relationships go the other way. I'll say, like most of the teams I work with understand that I'm not out to like get them, I'm out to give them coverage and occasionally like there's gonna be things that I have to report about and I'm always digging as a reporter but it's not like just gotcha journalism the whole time.</p> <p>So I think some teams lose sight of that or some teams don't understand what we're trying to do and that's where it's really hard to build trust but not being helpful... and from my end it's important to build trust with them too, so it's not always hitting them up only when I need something like if there's practice you can just you know talk to them like they're a normal human being and there gonna like that too, 'cause it's not you're relationship I think goes a little deeper with sports people than simply saying, "I need to talk to this person, I need to talk this person." 'cause you're working with them every single day, so if you don't get to know them it's gonna make your job harder, it's gonna make their jobs harder too.</p>
7.	<p>Yeah, it's definitely complicated. I mean, I think from their perspective ... They trust me, basically. Or, they do or they don't, but I think their concept of 'trust' is, "Okay, how well is this reporter going to convey what our team said in a fair way, present the facts in a fair way, and not take things out of context." You know, sort of the basic things. I think, on a more complex level, because I think that's pretty straightforward, but it's also like, "Okay, how can we trust them to sort of handle a lot of this information in a complex way?" And I think, at its worst, press and PR people look down on each other for different reasons.</p> <p>You know, if PR people don't like a story, it's always like, "Well, that reporter was dumb or lazy and they can't do the work to figure out what the real story was." You know, kind of all the stock things you hear when a PR team doesn't like a story. So, I think that's what trust is to them. You know, I think when you have a good relationship, trust can be ... If they trust that you do a good job or that they like your work and they think that you're capable of really diving into something and I have this relationship with a few offices</p>

	<p>where they'll really go out of their way to give you what you need, to give you ample time with their boss. You know, it can be a really, really good thing when you have that relationship where they think that I can do a good job with whatever thing it is and they're more willing to put their boss out there. They're willing to increase my access to their boss, which is really, really great and can lead to good stories for me.</p> <p>I guess from my end, it's tough because, like ... I need these people. I mean, we need each other for different reasons, but I need them. I have to get my quotes. I have to get my information. I gotta get my work done and a common thing with press is like ... You know, you assume people are lying until you have a good reason to believe that they're not lying.</p> <p>Not to be super cynical about it, but when you're dealing in Washington, in any political environment really, I mean, it's the PR team's job to spin and to put forward the version of stuff they most want to put forward that reflects their agenda and reflects what their boss wants to accomplish or whatever and you always have to take what they say with that grain of salt. Even the press people I'm really close with in certain offices, I know they've got a job to do and in a lot of cases, it's not just a job. They really do believe in their boss' politics, their boss' agenda, in a way that is actually kind of nice in a cynical town like Washington. It's not like they're coming to me with an agenda. It's inseparable from kind of who they are and what they want to do and you get that, but I sort of have to walk this fine line between, "Okay, are they telling me kind of the straight dope here? Are they really giving it to me straight or how much of this is colored by them trying to accomplish a certain thing put forward a certain version of events?"</p> <p>That's really a situational thing and you have to develop that instinct over time and that's definitely something that I'm really on in my career. It's a day by day process, really trying to get a sense of that because it is really difficult. So, it's an elusive thing. But, you gotta do your best.</p>
8.	<p>Trust is very mutual. It's a very mutual relationship, and I think the first thing you do by building trust is building some understanding between both myself as the journalist and you as an information broker or an information gatekeeper, because that's really what a lot of these people are, is they're information gatekeepers, especially when it involves a politician.</p> <p>Number one, don't lie to me. Number two, if you're going to offer up your person or your candidate at such-and-such a time and they can't do it, then call me back and tell me why. Don't blow me off; don't make me miss my deadline. The worst thing that a PR person or a Comms Director can do in my mind if they've got a story that's breaking, that kinda paints their person in a bad light, they have to be part of the conversation, because if they're not, somebody will fill the hole for them, and that's where a lot of PR people don't understand that you have to be part of the conversation, good, bad, or ugly, because if you're not, somebody will fill that empty space for you, and, most of the time, it's not going to be good.</p> <p>I think number one to building that trust is don't lie to me. Be up front with me, and deliver on what you promise you are going to do. If you say to me "We will have a statement out by 3:00," and it doesn't come 'til 4:59, you've just really eroded the trust factor right there. They've got to deliver on promises, you have to offer information that you say you're going to offer, you have to be proactive, and ... trying to search if something's coming down the line, or "Hey, give me a heads up about something that's going to happen tomorrow that you may be interested in," all of that's good, it's building the trust factor.</p>
9.	<p>Well, with PR, I would say the most important for trust is knowing that I can count on a practitioner to be honest and forthcoming and not to sell me a bad guest. Like, I think that ... I'm sure it's tough because, going back to the pitch relationship, they're trying to sell, they get paid by getting their person on the radio. And a lot of times they'll get people that, you know, they want their money, but the person isn't any good, so they're put in the bad position of trying to sell me something that they know isn't any good.</p> <p>We have one PR lady here in town, that I've banned from having her guests on the station, because she's had three or four ... Well, only on my portion, I can't ban her, obviously from the rest of the station, but she's give me a couple of bad guests in a row and I was just like, "It doesn't matter how good your guest is</p>

at this point, because I can't trust you, because you won't say ..." You know, you can be honest and just say, "This guy isn't the best."

I had some, you know, like book publishers, Because I want the good guest, like the top authors, so if they come to me and go, "Can you do me a favor? This one's not great." You know, I can work with that, because I trust that they're going to come through for me on the other stuff.

I need to trust ... You know, I mean, I trust obviously, it's most focused on honesty. I had one last week, I didn't know the guy, but it was the communications person for a Police Department, I was reaching out to them on a story. And I said to the guy, you know, the police chief didn't want to come out, and I said to him ... He said, "The schedule doesn't work right now, but maybe another day." And I said to him, "Is this a ... The schedule doesn't work, he can't come out today, or the schedule's never going to work?" He, you know, code being, he's not coming on, and he understood that.

And now, if I ever had to call him again, I know I could trust him to give me a truthful answer, because he said, "It's probably not going to work." Instead of just trying to be like, "Eh, try anytime." And letting me keep call back and wasting both of our times.

How do you think the public defines trust? What qualities do you think make a news outlet trustworthy to the public?

1. Gosh you know, it's tough because I used to think it was all about just accuracy, making sure you're not obviously misspelling words and things like that, but just putting out factual statements, whether they're statistics and citing everything too, that's a huge thing where if they feel like, where the heck did they even get this number from, that they have someplace that they can click to at least an organization that they will then know to go to, to try and find that. I think more than anything now, this is probably in the last few years all the shift has happened and I myself have been very, very careful of it, is trying to write stuff with a completely bipartisan point of view. We write stuff that can seem critical of the left and stuff that can seem critical of the right, but the way I think more so than anything, is how you phrase it. The way you write the sentence can totally change a person's opinion on whether or not they're gonna come back to your organization or read what you've written.

If they feel like this isn't totally like a hit piece, but they're just like kind of throwing jabs in the sentences, like more their use of adjectives. I avoid using adjectives to describe a person if they're potentially seen as in any way unfavorable, unless they're a blatant criminal or something like that, but I'm not really writing criminal pieces ever. I think the use of adjectives is something that is very much changed in my last couple years here.

Yeah, I think that's the big thing is because at least the websites that we read, we look at our competitors and ... they kinda write some of the stuff in the same field as us. Those two in particular are very much left-leaning and I, at least because I read so much news, very much notice it. People in the comments section of those articles definitely notice it too. I can't say the same for the Biz Journal because they don't have a comment section and their stories are just so short that it's kinda hard to even throw any sort of partisan opinion at.

Yeah, and I'm trying to think. I feel like it's just a matter of accurate information. I can be honest, we've definitely angered people with some stories we're written as far as Minneapolis for instance, a lot of the community leaders, our community councils and the mayor and everything have been largely blue and I think that we've tried to get the other half of the State, the red side. Something to kind of nibble at. I think it kind of had a negative effect on some people on the city council who were democratic.

I think there's a time where you know, you kind of asked the question of like, hey do we want to write

	<p>something that's totally bipartisan, or do we want to create a conversation and that's kind of the tough line where you might lose trust in certain people's eyes because you are writing something that is critical of something that they are very passionate about, but you want to be able to. I don't know, at least make people think about there might need to be a change here if we're gonna improve the situation, because the way it's been the last four or five years hasn't really gotten anywhere. I guess that doesn't totally answer your question, but I was just trying to think of specific examples where I have a hard time dealing with trust of different organizations because I barely trust most of the reporters in our local field here.</p> <p>Yeah, at least, like I said I don't know all of them personally... I don't think that they're bad people by any means and I think some of them are some of the most talented reporters... that I know, but I guess I just can't say that I've ever seen them as untrustworthy. I like to believe we're in the same field as the</p>
2.	<p>Trust is truth. Truth brings trust. Being able to get factual information ... and objective information, even in a subjective dialogue like an editorial or a column is important. To the degree that PR professionals can advance that essential objective of trust, that increases, like trust between the journalist and the PR professional.</p>
3.	<p>Vaguely speaking, I would probably say that it would be, or at least my ideal would be that the public would hope that we're reporting the most accurate information, making an effort to speak to everybody involved in topics that we are covering, and try not to frame stories or outright bolster stories with a given agenda.</p>
4.	<p>Yeah, I don't even know anymore honestly. After this thing [election], I feel like I don't even know if our publication has like a base audience or anything anymore. Gosh, I guess like how could a news outlet develop trust is just I think transparency is a very big thing and just trying to be entirely non-inflammatory with how you're framing things. Like avoid adjectives that can editorialize and things of that nature. It's hard, though, because it's like millions of people just grow up and decide, like wake up one day and decide that the New York Times is fake because they're writing truthful things about something that you like. I don't know. That's the answer.</p>
5.	<p>You know, it's interesting; I've been through lots of training on my end on how to attract viewers. One's called a pyramid of trust, and, for example, from an on-air personality, because as an anchor, my number one job is to attract new viewers and keep the viewers we have. It's also important as a journalist to be accurate, but really, I am judged by how many viewers I can attract. So this is where the pyramid of trust comes in, and I don't have it word-for-word here, but if they put you on the air and, we're a visual medium, and if you look funny or you wear distracting clothing, that's the first step, you just have to overcome that to be accepted.</p> <p>The second step is if you sound or behave in an awkward way, you have to overcome that. In other words, there should be no distractions but the information you are communicating.</p> <p>Third thing, then, is build on your body of work. Are you showing that you are well-rounded, and are knowledgeable?</p> <p>Fourth thing then, is ... and really the first two are likeability, kind of thing, you know, then you start building on your professionalism, and then once you've overcome and you can get to that next step, that you've shown you are knowledgeable, you've got a body of work that shows that you are experienced, then the top of that pyramid is trust. All the research shows that once you get a viewer to trust you, they never go away.</p> <p>And they're very loyal. And it's the same thing in that relationship with PR people. I got sidetracked about your question about trust with viewers, but that's how I look at it. So, as an organization, we build trust by not scaring people needlessly. Like, screaming, "Oh, this is the worst!" And in our newsroom... we mock [national network] news endlessly, because every night, [the anchor] comes on, and I don't know if you watch him, and he says, "We've got breaking news." And, "This storm could impact 24 million people."</p> <p>And that's inflammatory writing, and so, we do that by being consistent, by holding the powerful</p>

	<p>accountable, by responding to viewer needs and questions. I return every email and phone call I get from a viewer, no matter how nasty it is. And people are just surprised, "You what! You called?" And I will tell you, nine times out of 10, they will come back and watch.</p> <p>And so I think it's being dependable, and I take great pride in what we do, here, in Minnesota, as we are the real journalists. We're not showing Facebook pictures of kittens, and cooking, and talking about, "Okay, we did comparison testing on five different kinds of knives or blow dryers, and here's our recommendation." We're changing state law and that's how I think you build trust with viewers, by being consistent and it takes forever.</p>
6.	Quick reporting, no lean/editorial slant, factual, correct information
7.	<p>I guess, broadly speaking, as I'm sure plenty of people have told you, yeah, it's, "Do your readers think that you're rendering events and quotes and information in an unbiased, fair, you know, so on and so forth, way?" I think it's ... Obviously, this is where the current political dynamic comes in, where that foundation of the objective press really has sort of eroded and now it's just people have ... You know, they live in their silos of information and politics and they are ... What they bring to the table, more so than ever, determines how they interpret what you say and what you write, which makes it really hard.</p> <p>I like to think, and I do believe this, I think it's seen as a really fair news outlet and a fair ... It contains a range of opinions. I think it's pretty transparent. You know, it's not like we've got an activist owner or we're run by somebody with a long history of working for one party or another.</p> <p>When I do hear from readers, I actually get a nice mix of positive and negative. Often, the negative is from people who are very far to the left, actually, who think I'm carrying water for Republicans because I quote them fairly and I don't instantly degrade or deride whatever it is that they're doing.</p> <p>I don't know if anyone has mentioned this, but there's sort of ... It's not a maxim or anything, but it's this thought in journalism that, if you're pissing off both sides equally, you're doing your job, and I think there's truth to that. I think if you're pissing off both sides, you're doing your job, but I also think if you're ... If both sides respect you, you're doing your job, too, and it's definitely nice to get ... I really am happy that I'm able to claim that I have a really solid relationships with sources on both sides, from very far liberals to very far conservatives, who trust me enough to work with me and cooperate with me for my stories and I think the same can be said of my colleagues. Yeah. It's funny. You know, you sometimes have to laugh off the hate mail from readers, you know? Often, they're just reading into what they want to read into and it's ... It's the moment right now. It's so difficult and you just gotta roll with it the best that you can.</p>
8.	<p>Well, you can spend an entire week covering that topic. In the eyes of the public what makes somebody trustworthy, especially a news person or contact, is "are they being authentic, are they being real?" Do they perceive that they're not being lied to, or not answering the questions or the topics that are before them? I think that's huge.</p> <p>As far as a news outlet, I think "Are you presenting as many sides of the story as you possibly can?" I think one of the biggest issues journalists are facing these days is that erosion of reporting the facts or offering opinions, and we've seen that at the national level, at the cable news level, where cable news is now dominated, not so much by news, but by talking heads, and everyone has their own agenda that they're going after, and cable news has kind of degenerated to the point where it's just people yelling at each other, and I don't think that there's a lot of understanding that's going on there.</p> <p>So we're constantly facing that battle every day, especially at a local level, and I hope the audience would perceive a difference between the two, that we're going out and trying to develop stories every day and leave our opinions out of it, but that's something that we'd have to drill down into focus groups or local research to see if that's happening, but based upon the interaction that I get with viewers through emails and face-to-face contact, I think they perceive a difference.</p>
9.	Well, I mean, that's obviously a really interesting question right now. Because of the presidents and the

mantra of fake news. You know, I think people are more distrustful of the media now ... I would say that my experience here would be that, it's very rare that we're not honest with the listener, whether or not the listener feels we're being honest with them. I think that the issue with trust right now is so fragmented because people believe what they believe, and there's news sources that they can go get whatever they believe. So anybody who says something they don't believe in, they don't trust.

I look at the new room and I listen to them and I see them report, and I know that they're honestly reporting it as the best of their abilities in the way that they see.... You know, I go and I talk to them from time to time and just say, "Hey, you know, this is a different viewpoint, this is a different question I would ask." From the outside, you say, "Well, they're not being honest." You know, or, "I don't trust them because they don't have the same viewpoint I have."

Then, when you're inside you know they just didn't look at it that way, or didn't think of that question, because that's the way they see the world. They weren't being dishonest, they weren't trying to mislead, they just, you know, they reported it how they thought the story went.

It's hard for ... You know; I think the audience trusts whoever gives them what they believe in.

So they trust what they see, you know, what they get from this one guy versus what is happening in reality. So I guess the short version is just that, trust for the audience come down to saying what they already believe.

Do you trust practitioners more or less from an agency or in-house?

- 1.** Yeah, I have experienced that. That's funny that you mention it, because yeah, there's a difference between someone who is handling their own organization that they're employed for and someone who's juggling six to eight different companies and they may send out four press releases in the morning for four different clients. Then they're like, okay, you're calling about who? It's kinda the funny thing of like you have to explain it and sometimes they still are unsure, like they haven't had their morning coffee yet.

More times than any they are good. I think they're just a little slower if anything and I don't totally blame them for that. I feel like maybe at least I try and be understanding of the fact that if you're working for your own organization, I kind of expect that you'd be able to get up the food chain and know who to talk to better than someone who maybe only knows a handful of people at this company that they represent, or that they're a client.

If they just try and get me off to one of the C suite executives, like the CFO, CEO, someone like that, I'm totally happy with that because they may not be even the best person to talk to because they don't have all the information, or the best opinion on it, but at least they're able to kinda follow more times than any, because typically if those PR clients, I find if an organization is hiring an agency, they really want to get media attention versus an organization let's say again like Target, they may put out two, three releases in a day sometimes and they may not want to give you a lot of information. It's kinda weird. There's a clear disconnect.
- 2.** It's far more up to the professionalism of the individual and the structure of their institution. Those that understand and respect the process can and often do, you know, work and reflecting in-house orgs are equally rewarding or problematic.
- 3.** I work with them very rarely. And if so it would probably be somebody who represents an attorney trying to put a lawsuit on our radar and they might send us an email. Maybe it might be a lawsuit that I would still come across doing my own daily reporting, but they might be able to be a go-between to let me know that yes, an attorney and/or a client would be commenting. But it's pretty rare. I think they want to be [helpful]

	because they want this, for any number of reasons they want that given lawsuit to be covered by as much media as they can, so they're gonna want to help connect me and anyone else with sources.
4.	<p>I think it kind of depends what type of agency work it is. I'm just remembering a lot of startups or kind of medium-sized corporations that would pitch through an agency and it was like ... It didn't seem like there was of in general, a great interest in doing anything but sort of just your client's bidding on this current project. I get that that's the logistics of it. I always just wondered, like I never want to write about any of this stuff. I don't know what the value is for the company either.</p> <p>It just was kind of like ... I'm sure they're doing other things aside from pitching and maybe it is effective but it just kind of baffled me. I couldn't imagine a bigger news outlet ever taking a pitch like that, but I think in like the arts or entertainment coverage, I get that you're going to need ... You need to hire an agency, because one small entity can't sustain having a person. Those are the pitches where I'm more inclined to say, "Hey, can I get an interview with this person, blah, blah, blah." Does that make any sense?</p> <p>I have people at the city who I knew and people at the U. I knew like oh, cool, I've worked with you. You're not going anywhere. Your contact's not going to end, like I can call you at nine o'clock on occasion when I need something answered and you can do the same.</p>
5.	<p>I think agencies are a little harder to develop that relationship with because agencies are beholden, and not that you aren't beholden to the person paying your salary, but agencies are beholden to the clients a little more, and more protective, and it's a little harder pitch. I think, it's just my personal opinion. Communications/ PR people who work for organizations have a great depth of knowledge about those organizations than hiring somebody to handle their PR for them. I think organizations, PR people that are on the payroll and part of the administration of the organization, to me, I have an easier time developing relationships, where corporate PR, I just feel like I'm being pitched when I hear from them.</p>
6.	Not much experience with agencies/publicists, so hard to say.
7.	<p>So, the times that I work with agency people, it's like ... They ... Obviously, it's for a lot of groups that, you know, they don't have the resources to do always, around the clock, in-house person. That could often be these sorts of advocacy groups that have kind of the light footprint. For example, a while back, I did this story on the sugar industry and I was talking to definitely some advocacy groups on both sides, but there was this group that ... They were basically a front for the big food and candy companies. And had a pretty straightforward agenda. They did not have an in-house comms anything.</p> <p>I felt like they've got a client that's a really ... They're doing a job. They're getting paid to do it. I don't think I trust them any less than somebody, for example, who works for a congressman and really believes in their congressman. I think they both have a job to do and I wouldn't say that I ... It really kind of ... You know, what really affects it is, "Okay, who is this person? What's their agenda?" If the agenda is to ... You know, this is their client, they got a job to do, then that's fine by me and, in working with them, they work ... Most of me experiences with kind of the third party people, agency people, have been fine.</p>
8.	<p>It really doesn't matter, and obviously agencies got some clients that they're pushing, and I always have that in the back of my mind that they're calling because they're representing a client, they're being paid to represent a client and to get a client's certain point of view in front of the press. If you know that going in, you also know the proper questions to ask, kind of "What's in this for you, what are you trying to get out? What kind of communication problem here are you trying to solve by talking to me?" Any smart journalist is going to know that and understand that.</p> <p>Let's say you get an in-house PR person calling you, or sending you an email, they're trying to solve a communication problem or a sales problem or something as well. I can't tell you how many emails I get, blast emails from PR people thinking that I work for a morning show or something like that and, "Hey we got this new product that solves this, or this new face cream or whatever that we think your viewers would want to know about." No! No, I'm sorry, here's the number to our Sales department, give them a call.</p>
9.	You know, I mean, I would say, and like, if you're in-house in a place ... I guess I look at all of them as saying, "You're getting paid by this person, so I know where your loyalty's lie." Right? So, I always come from it from

that position. My trust issue would be more on our dealings in the past, as far as, "Have you been honest with me?" Or do I feel like you're, you know, if it's an in-house news person, do I feel like you're blocking me and not being honest about that? Or, are you honest about the quality of your guest? But I never look at it ... Like, I wouldn't say there's a difference between and agency and an in-house, straight-up because I think either way I look at them, is they're getting paid by that person.

You know, and that isn't saying that I hold that against them, but I just, I know ... They're both getting paid, so I don't think one is any more or less. I guess I would say that I find it more likely that I'm going to get an honest answer from somebody at an agency. Because they know that that client isn't always going to be there, versus somebody who's in-house and that's their livelihood, like 100%.

At the U of M, we at times encounter crises and issues, which can impact the public's trust on the institution. Does your view about an organization change your feelings about the PR practitioners you work with?

1. Like I say, when there is kind of a shady organization or like things going on, I just have had enough experience with calling and saying, "Hey, do you have a statement on this?" And they're like, 'No, we definitely don't' then they hang up and then they won't want anything to do with media outlooks during that time. Maybe it is just; I'll throw a phone call or a voicemail over there just for the sake of literally having to do it. Almost like they're kinda filling that blank in the story and stuff like that. We try to get their side of the story, they're not gonna talk, so at least we can say that we tried and they chose not to give a comment. I guess if they are willing to talk and I have spoken to people at that organization before, PR practitioners there and I had a good relationship with them, I don't think I would hesitate to call. I think I'd just more me personally, I'm maybe a little shy, I'm like, "Listen, we kinda need to talk about the elephant in the room. You know?"

You kinda take a soft approach to it, because you don't want them to think that you're trying to dig up as much dirt as possible and just smear the organization that they get a paycheck from every other week. I don't feel good about essentially ruining the company, or just good people who work there. I want to at least be like a community figure I guess and someone who can write about stuff, but not ruin people's lives essentially. Yeah, if there's someone who on the other side is willing to talk to me, I'd love to talk to them, but it's all up to them at that point, because they kind of ... The ball is essentially in their court and they can choose to talk to me or not.

[later in conversation] The only thing I can say is more times than any, I find that PR professionals are doing a good job and the only frustrations I at times have, are with the people that they work for. That might be the only time where they're very dodgy and that sort of thing. Unless they're the director of communications... and they have been doing this for 40 years and they act like they're pretty much a huge department head, which they are and they know how to work around my inquiries. More times than any, people are kind of a little more open book, which is nice.

2. It's a good question. You know, assuming that the crisis isn't triggered by that individual, or the individual or part of the institution they're ... Then it need not be deleterious to the overall relationship. I think that in the same way that news organizations often face outside challenges and pressures, but not every journalist is reflective of those or involved in those. There needs to be a separation from that perspective, the same, I think, could be said for PR professionals. You in particular, because we work so much together and reflective of your mitigation, think about how much turmoil has surrounded the University of Minnesota, a huge institution with so many individuals, you're going to have that. Yet, it's never made me feel like ... I think it's important to say I don't usually write about that kind of turmoil, that's not my beat, necessarily. But, you know, that has never made me reticent to contact you, nor have you allowed that turmoil to affect your work with me. I mean we can even be more specific in that there have been times where I'm sure the university leadership is not pleased with the paper, or in particular the editorial page, you know, on what they're happen to be saying. That hasn't in any way impacted my ability or desire to work with you and your team.

3.	Well it would definitely be variable on what the trust is individually with that source, and so if it's somebody who again is honest and you have a good relationship with, might be able to ferret out additional information, or at least get a sense of what's going on, and of course this with the caveat this person is not involved in, and it's hypothetical controversy. That would probably change things quite a bit, but largely if it's just somebody who's serving as a spokesperson, and I have a great, pretty good deal of trust with them, I don't know that it would affect in what they were directly involved or again that trust between us breaks down, I think that just goes back to individual relationship itself.
4.	It just, if anything, it kind of bums me out that individuals seem hesitant at times to call things what they apparently are. Like when something appears to be so, and I'm referring to the athletics department, like it appears there's a lot of bad. That's not damning every person involved with it, but it does seem like an institutional issue and nobody really seems like they can talk about that from within or be like I guess as honest as I would like people to be. It's very much just like giving the company line on it. I get it. It just bums me out. I try to process like these are just people doing their best but it's like the constraints of the job that bum me out.
5.	I feel it doesn't impact it at all. If I have that trust. Because then, I'm like, I go, "Oh, man, you're having a long day, aren't you?" I mean, and it's just that that is what's landed in your to-do list today, and so, no. If anything, it develops empathy. At least that's my opinion, and ... but again even when ... what's so funny is even when the shit is hitting the fan at the U with that kind of stuff, they're is, very often, in the same newscast, we'll be doing stuff and, "Look at this great thing they invented over there," you know. And so, no, that doesn't impact. I just feel like, "Okay, this is what you're dealing with today." And if I happen to be assigned to that, it's like, "Well, I'm really sorry but here's what I need. What can you tell me?"
6.	<p>I think maybe yes and no, just because if something's like, so say a big scandal is going around, hypothetically, the PR staff's gonna shift to damage control right away, and they're gonna try and yes limit access but just kinda more control messages, and like for my job, I don't wanna report that controlled message so I'm gonna dig deeper, I'm gonna go around them, gonna talk to people, you know, sources, other people connected to the team in other ways, you're not just gonna accept like, "Oh that person is not available, okay I'll just write 'no comment'." so I guess it really can impact relationships but I think it's more of a short-term thing.</p> <p>If you write something that's not favorable but true and they know that, maybe they're mad for a little awhile, maybe players are upset with that report or that you know all of the things that are coming out, but if you continue to be consistent and go back and own it, it's different if I write something and then I'm like too scared to see them the next day, I think they respect being there and you wrote something they might really dislike but you're not afraid to show your face the next day and continue to do the job that you've been doing all along. So I think it's, they seem to maybe have maybe short-term ramifications but if you continue to be consistent and do your job they'll respect that too, like this guy's just doing his job. Just I think everyone start's to realize that after awhile.</p>
7.	I think it depends, obviously, on the level of ... You know, how far removed the person is from whatever's happening. I think if it's a really, really big institution, like the U or something, and it was found that the president or provost or anybody higher up was doing something illegal or whatever, I wouldn't think at all that that would reflect poorly on you or affect our working relationship or whatever, but if it's a press secretary and a congressman, then I think that's where it starts to get a little more ... I would be predisposed to not jump to conclusions or to cast judgment on somebody I work with because their boss did something bad, but if there's a proximity there, obviously it raises concerns that wouldn't ... Again, I wouldn't jump to any conclusions or anything like that based on something that happened that that person wasn't involved in. Yeah, and I think there's certainly examples of institutions where it appears like the culture is just kind of broken and usually that is evident before any kind of scandal comes out. You can kind of tell, if you talk to enough people, that there's a certain environment and it causes people to behave in certain ways or whatever and that can affect how much you trust them or how much you don't trust them. Yeah, I guess what I would say to your question is I would definitely be predisposed to not judge anybody based on whatever was happening at their institution, but obviously, you gotta keep a lookout and if there's reason to believe that it affected any of your working relationship, you gotta pay attention to that.

<p>8.</p>	<p>No, but again let me qualify that, it depends upon that practitioner, again, is not being truthful to me and up front to me and responsive to me.</p> <p>Okay, great example, I've known a specific PR practitioner since he was with an agency back in the day, and he got the job at the U, so we have a relationship going back probably 10 years, and when I call up him for something for some kind of crisis at the U or something that's happening, we know each other, so I perceive there's always kind of a little bit of a trust factor there, you have to ask his point of view.</p> <p>He has never been distrustful to me in the past, he's always been respectful, he's always returned my phone calls, he's always delivered what he's promised and doesn't oversell and over deliver. Yes, there are been times where there have been bad news, and he, I think, has been a professional and has tried to meet that head-on and has given us the access, and if he can't provide access, he's provided a statement or gives me an insider's " here's what's coming down the pike, here's what the U is doing."</p> <p>For example, when the Washington Redskins came to town here a couple of years ago to play the Vikings at TCF Bank Stadium, the Native American community was trying to boycott the game, and it really kind of a difficult communications challenge for the university, and the university and he was open and honest about "Here's what President Kaler's going to do this week, here are the discussion groups we're having, here's what we're doing with the Native American tribes." He didn't try to hide what the university was attempting to do, and again, it kind of comes back to building some relationships with people. I know a few people, and they know me, and sometimes the relationships aren't the best, but by working through some of these people and working with them on various stories over the year, you kind of get an idea as to how they operate.</p>
<p>9.</p>	<p>Yeah, I mean, probably. But in the sense that it would be, too, I would have the sympathy of knowing, if we had a relationship, right, I would have the sympathy of knowing that you're in a bad position.</p> <p>But at the same time, if it starts to feel like you're not delivering, or not being honest, then, you know, it could certainly become adversarial and hurt our relationship long-term. I would be sympathetic if I know somebody, and I know that they've got ... If they're in a bad spot, and especially if it's something that they don't want to comment on, or can't comment on, or whatever, getting hammered. If it's somebody I know, I would understand that position and I would have empathy.</p> <p>But at the same time, you know ... If they flake on me and don't come through ... I wouldn't hold it against them long-term if it was only one time, but it could change the relationship, depending on how things go.</p> <p>But yeah, I would say, it can certainly, like a big crisis and a bad response can change a dynamic long-term. I mean, in all case-by-case, it's hard to say, like, I have not had one personally where I've come out on the other end and had a relationship ruined.</p>

Do you feel like it's more difficult to be a journalist under the "fake news" era / new presidential administration? Why? How does social media play into this?

<p>1.</p>	<p>That's a good question. I'm not being criticized at all for putting out political pieces. If I was [other political beat reporters] I might be a little bit more worried because those people are in that spotlight that is getting really hammered on. The business scene is just an entirely different animal and so I don't find that it's been totally affecting me. If anything, the only effect it's really had is, I did some look-see at how Trump's policies versus Hillary's policies would have given if they were elected. That was way back in November. That actually did really well with people, because it was showing both sides of it and I wasn't speaking my own opinion. I was taking opinions from people at the U, which I think you actually helped me with that story. I believe from St. Thomas or elsewhere too. I tried to be as complete as I could, so I don't typically step into the fake news political stage, but if I did, I would probably be scared right now. It's the same thing, I don't know if you saw at the House when Ryan gave his speech on this is the time that we can all agree we all</p>
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	stand together and Pelosi came up and she said the same, it was after the shooting this week. They're scared obviously for themselves because of the climate right now. I think journalists are too and I don't think that any of us would be afraid to admit that a Charlie Hebdo situation could happen here. It's not the thing we really talk about though, but I mean yeah, you try to be fair...
2.	<p>More essential to be a journalist and the necessity of getting it right has always and will always be there. The scrutiny and the cynicism surrounding the practice of journalism has never been higher, but that doesn't mean that we've decided to ... We've always been in pursuit of as objective a view of the truth as possible.</p> <p>[Regarding social media] You know, information, responses, acceleration, it's changing nearly everything. You know, you mentioned it before, and I'm not one who would publicly respond to social media, especially if it's from a PR professional. That doesn't mean it doesn't impact the news narrative and people's reaction to it.</p>
3.	<p>I personally have not experienced added difficulty. I think we always are dealing with people who have for whatever reason a mistrust of the media, you know, this is from a public standpoint, but how you quantify that and how you look at them as representative of the general public I think can muddy things. Oftentimes it's the loudest voices that get the most attention, but I still get the sense that the majority of people who rely on us for information are generally just, mind their own business, do their own thing, they don't want to create a stir. And then, at the same time from my own sources, what I cover, again I personally haven't encountered any radical changes that have made my job more difficult.</p> <p>I think I would loop just the web in general with that, in that it creates a sense of urgency for editors to have reporters finish, to have at least a short burst of a story, if it's a breaking story, as soon as possible, and continue to post throughout the day, whereas you know, 15 years ago or even 10 years ago or less it was a little bit different.</p>
4.	<p>Yeah, I think that it is. A lot of times when people say that and I think it comes across as like an oh, boo-hoo, my job is hard type thing, but it definitely affects you outside of work, too. Just when people think you're a part of this conspiratorial mainstream media. Its like, "I know you, but you're apart of this thing that I've been told not to trust." I think it's definitely harder. It's good pressure, because you have to earn trust and if you've lost it, it just makes it harder. I think we're definitely more deliberate in being transparent about how we're covering things and thinking a lot about valence and false equivalency and just like headline framing. You're never going to please everybody, but I think in general, it's been harder in the past year. It's just like it affects conversations I have with friends and just how I'm treated in social circles at times. You get harassed on the internet by readers and stuff. It's kind of fucked up. Yeah and like, I'm a white guy. I can't imagine what it would be like looking like someone who is a target of harassment more so and still writing stuff, Jesus Christ.</p> <p>Yeah [I get emails], and oddly enough it was around the month surrounding the election. I've gotten nice emails before, too. Don't get me wrong but it's usually just like people saying egregious shit on Twitter and somebody who appears to not be all there rants and accuses you of working for the Clintons or something like that. It's like good god, man.</p>
5.	<p>It's more difficult, but it's never been more important. And I don't even blame the administration. It's social media. They're just using social media in a way that no elected leader ... no presidential administration ever has before. Since I've been doing this, we went from our competition with newspapers, and then the website rolled out. We never put anything on the website because we didn't want to and the website was where stories went to die and then it went to, when Facebook and Twitter, and now Instagram. Everything is so darned immediate, now we have no secrets. And we got to get everything out there as quickly as possible and it's a race. And what happens in races, is you make mistakes, and so it is more difficult to be factual and accurate, which is the most important thing that I do as a journalist, because of the pressure to be first and to get it everywhere.</p> <p>However ... and you know the whole thing with the Trump Administration, he's just running the country like</p>

he ran his companies. And that's what he knew. That's why he was elected. And I've got no dog in the race. I am unbiased and I ... but there are just as many people thrilled with what he's doing as there are angry about what he's doing.

My daughter showed me this great post. It's this kid who does these one-minute commentaries and he talked about being a liberal, he was always so proud to be a liberal, but now he's ashamed because liberals are stamping out the freedom of speech of conservatives.

Liberals are showing up at rallies and not letting people speak, you know, and so it goes both ways, and it's a challenge of a journalist to see through all of that clutter and that bullshit, and to try and talk about what is accurate, and we are at a time right now, and every time I get a chance to talk to viewers or groups who come into the station, or students, it is so important to get your information from more than one source. If you really, truly want to be informed, and really, local news, and I will say that about all local news, there is less bias in local news than any other kind of news. The networks, completely different thing.

The cable companies, way different thing, you know. They are. Their entertainment, their programming is opinion, and opinion is not news. And so, with the president sending out these tweets and angering everybody, he's just using social media, you know? And people follow him, and so, it just ... to be informed.

And this whole thing with fake news is, oh, my god! But it's real! Russia has admitted planting fake news stories. And if you're not smart enough to understand ... what was the Hillary Clinton one where she ... I can't remember. I'm not talking about the emails. It was the one where ... oh, god! It was just so far out and bizarre, and it was like, "What!" People believe that?

We spend just as much time proving things are not true on social media, especially, as we are confirming that they are true.

But on the other hand, social media is a great tool. There's never been a time like this when we can communicate instantly. Friday night, when the demonstrators shut down 94, there were probably 2,000 people and we stayed on the air. There were probably 2,000 people on that road, and I bet 500 of them had their cameras turned on Facebook, live.

And you want to hear this? Listen to this. Speaking of PR, the Saint Paul police department is part of its new plan to handle these things; they were live on Facebook from the other side, behind the officers, showing the insults that these officers were taking. All of us in the newsroom on our phones have three different ways we can go live on the air, instantly, from wherever we are. And Facebook, by the way, has also changed its policies. I just got out of a big session with this last week; anything live on Facebook goes right to the top of their feeds. . And so, for example, if you are covering a story for the U, I mean, if you're promoting it, you go live on Facebook, and that goes right to the top of everyone's feeds because their great emphasis now is on live content. And it'll be something different next week, you know, but that's their emphasis now. If they see it's live, "Boom!" They push it, you know. So I thought that was really interesting, so yeah, it makes it harder, but it's never been more important to being a journalist.

6. I've kinda thought about this just as obviously the president, everything that's happening really effects just everything, but I've always thought of sports like, and it's kinda made me, I don't wanna say question my career but like wonder is me reporting this game as important as like you know the political reporters reporting about the travel ban that affects people 10 times more, a 100 times, a 1,000 times more than whether a team beats another team, you know?

So it's made me wonder like how important this is. And I look a sports a lot of times like I think there's, there's obviously stories to be told and things to be reported on, but like as an escape from all this b.s. and everything that's going on around elsewhere and I think a lot of people look at sports as like an escape, so I don't know if it necessarily, like the "fake news", you know this whole administration has really changed

what how I report, how I do my job, or how people look at my job and look at what I report about.

I think you have obviously the people who joke like, "Oh, fake news, blah, blah." If something's happening around. You know it's just kind of a punchline at this point, because people are so desensitized to just the actual impact that that, those two words and just the idea behind that has. But I don't think it really carries over to sports much just because I think everyone still kinda looks at it as an escape and people you can't... there's no fake news if the team lost, the team lost, you're reporting those facts, so there's not really what to they call it, "alternative facts", or whatever, you know it's like everything's right in front of ya, you're just kinda doing your job and it's fair, yeah.

I'd say Twitter the biggest platform for me and I'd say Twitter's probably the biggest platform for all journalists right now, just because it's so accessible and it's very quick and I think that's how a ton of people my age and maybe a little bit younger and maybe even a little bit older like digest news now 'cause it's very, whether that's good or bad, but it's just so easy to look at 140 characters and know what's happening, get a snapshot of what's going on, so for me I'm usually, I'm on Twitter all the time.

I tweet less during the off season, very much during the regular season and it's the most mundane things sometimes but things that fans wanna know nonetheless, like, "I'm at practice, so-and-so isn't on the ice" and like that's a big deal to fans and they wanna know that and it's like you're a beacon into the team so they wanna know so-and-so is not on the ice. And then as soon as practice ends they wanna know why so-and-so wasn't on the ice, so you're, you're giving them constant content, constant information and it's a way to reach your audience, your readers, your starting a story that will be in print the next day or that story that shows up online the next, in the next hour or so. For example, like breaking news there's a trade the other day. So not in our market there's a huge trade and everyone I follow, who covers this team were tweeting it immediately, So-and-so's been traded, so-and-so has been traded for this, these are the terms and that's how everyone started to digest the news right away.

Shortly after you have a quick story up on your website to get your clicks... but I think news breaks faster on Twitter now just because it's a race to be first and if you have it and you're waiting so you can get the story up online and then you get beat then no one read it so it's kind of a thing I mean it's everywhere not just in sports like you wanna be first, you wanna present this first, it adds to your credibility and I think Twitter helps with that. I also think Twitter is like a dumpster fire for some things 'cause it's just anyone can be on it, anyone can share what they think what they tweet, a person can think what he tweets, so it's like give everyone access to say their thoughts at all times but I think used in the correct way it's very helpful and it's something that it really has changed the way we report and the way we do our jobs.

7. Never before, until Trump became president, have people, random people, sources, politicians, never have they before, until now, gone out of their way to thank me for doing my job and to express their appreciation that I am doing this job. That has never happened and I, you know, get sources saying, you know, "How are you holding up? We just appreciate what you do. We may not always agree. We appreciate everything you do." That's pretty indicative of the environment that we're in right now, if people feel that it is necessary to say that kind of thing. So, yeah. I think that's to say that I don't know if it's harder. Honestly, I feel like, in a lot of ways, my job is easier because there's so much to write about now. I definitely feel more energized because I feel like I'm ... You know, and I think a lot of journalists would say this, is that our job is more important than ever.

That there's just so much out there. Not that there wasn't lying and deception in the world before Trump became president, but there's ... I think it fit into a lot of people, just sort of those things that already existed, now that that's sort of risen to the top of our power system, that people are kind of seeing it everywhere now and people are finding connections and stuff and I think, yeah, it makes our job more important than ever, for sure. Yeah, there's plenty to write about and stuff, but yeah, I think it's important to note, well, yes, this is crazy that we have a president that calls the press the enemy of the people and that hasn't happened for decades and it's definitely not worth writing that off, but kind of these big picture

	<p>changes in the way media has worked have been building for decades, where you have people migrating to their little silos, to their little universes, of right wing or left wing media. That's been happening for a while and it's definitely been ...</p> <p>I started out at an unabashedly progressive outlet and it was kind of crazy to watch how being a journalist there and how their work was received and how that was all unfolded. I mean, it people didn't react so much differently then than they do now. I think a lot of that anger and the way people respond to partisan media, all still there, so it's definitely been building. I don't feel like the environment, broadly, is a whole lot different now than it was when I started, really.</p>
8.	<p>Yes, because you have to, because it's a double edged sword really. For every challenge, there's also an opportunity. The challenge is now, especially for viewers, is for viewers to identify what's legitimate, and especially on social media, we face the same challenge as our viewers. When we see something out there, when somebody's posted to us or shared something to us, "Hey, you need to look into this," we're instantly trying to vet it as well to see if it's authentic, or is this something that's not real. So it's every bit as much our challenge too.</p> <p>Now, it also presents an opportunity for us as journalists to build that reputation with our viewers that we are a source of credible information, and that's kind of how I view this right now, I'm viewing social media through the lens of the fact that journalists have an opportunity to really be that knight in shining armor, to really be the person or organization that viewer/readers/listeners can turn to, and that requires more vigilance on our behalf, too. That requires us to double down on making sure that our sources are vetted, that our stories are double checked, that we're trying to be as truthful and meaningful as we can possibly be. So I think it's a two-way street, I really do.</p>
9.	<p>I would say there's lots of things that are easier and harder, right? So, going back to what we kind of started at the beginning, nowadays, it is so easy to get good guests ... Not easy; it's easier to get good guests on the radio station.</p> <p>Like last week we wanted a constitutional scholar. I went online, searched constitution obstruction of justice, whatever, found an article, read the article. There was a guy quoted in it, a professor. So, I google his name, I get his CV from the university, right there got his email. I send him an email; he's booked for the radio station in 15 minutes. Like, you couldn't do that 15 years ago. So, in those senses, it's easier to cover the news and cover stories better than we used to. At the same time, we talk about social media and the change in culture to write. So, used to be, on Friday the Castile shooting, you could get somebody from the NAACP or whoever on right away. That person wanted to come on and talk. But now, because they have their own venues to get out, social media, Facebook, blogs, whatever, they don't feel the need to come on the radio as much. And they can control their message and not have to face tough questions in those environments.</p> <p>So it does make it harder to cover breaking news like that, because people that used to willingly and easily come on that radio don't come on the radio. And then you get into, kind of like what we talked about earlier, in the days of social media and stories' just blowing up out of proportion, the message is controlled so much tighter.</p> <p>Delta or United is so worried about, you know, when they dragged the guy out of the airplane, the President coming on and saying something, then it's going to go viral and everybody's going to get upset about it. Where they don't come out anymore. Whereas the old days, it was much more like, it didn't go past Minneapolis. So, if the U was in trouble or another local company was in trouble, the guy just came on the radio. And you've got 60% of all the people listening to radio in the cities, and he got his message out. And now they can control it through Twitter, and blogs, and Facebook, they can control the message and not have to answer any questions. So in those ways, it certainly is harder to cover it. But it's easier in that there's way more information and its way easier to find things, right? Because the internet is praised for that.</p>

How long have you been a journalist?	
1.	3+ years
2.	9+ years
3.	7+ years
4.	5+ years
5.	30+ years
6.	5+ years
7.	3+ years
8.	35+ years
9.	15+ years

Do you have autonomy on stories you're pursuing, or is there influence from your editors on the stories you cover?	
1.	Yes, to some extent. I am one of the lucky ones I would say, where I get to pretty much choose what I want to write. I do wake up, come to work and I look through what I feel are kinda the topics that I think need to be covered for that day. We have pitch meetings and I throw out the ideas that I have. Sometimes I do get assigned stories, but more I'd say, nine out of ten times, I'm pretty much the one who's thought of the idea and they say, "Go for it." There are of course editors that read over it, come back questions and might tweak it in some way, but by and large, I'm kind of the, I kinda row my own boat in a sense.
2.	Both. I would say a combination. Me, I'm a columnist, so certainly that direction is going to come from what I want to write about and how I want to approach it. Again, I'm an editorial writer, and that's more like your local collaborative projects.
3.	It's generally, I would say it skews toward me and other reporters finding our own stories during the course of our daily reporting, and then of course every so often there'll be a directive either from my editor or there's a series of editors above him who will also weigh in. And all sometimes that depends on current events. Say there's a breaking news event during the week. There'll oftentimes be a directive to do a deeper story on that for the weekend, for example.
4.	It's like kind of anything and everything. I do some editing as well and a lot of curation from wire services. I'll take wires and as far as like what my name goes on, sometimes I'll say like, "I want to write this," and somebody edits it. Or it's like, "Oh, dude, do this story." Yeah, it's definitely a mix.
5.	Both. And so I have the luxury of, very often, shooting my stories ahead of time.
6.	It's dictated mostly by the performance of the team.
7.	It's sort of my job to say, "This is happening. This is what's worth covering." It's nice to get tips from my editors that are like, "Hey, you should look into this thing that's happening in Minnesota that has a DC connection," or something like that and those can be really good stories, too.
8.	Both ways. We're expected every day to come to our editorial meeting with story ideas, and, granted, there are some days where just the flow of news coming in that we have to cover overwhelms the ideas. So you've got a number of issues going on today that kind of swamp out any individual story ideas we may bring to the table, but on a daily basis, yes, we're expected to bring our own story ideas to the table and pursue them, and occasionally the producers will say, "No, no, we want this today, we want you to do this, based upon a viewer tip that has come in, or a phone call, or something else that's happening," so it runs both ways, it really does.
9.	I would say, that's going to vary per show. Because that can change, it depends on how involved in your show. Now, my show would be, definitely, a different case than every other one, because with this show, I would say, 95% of the show is decided by me. I find what I'm interested in, or what I think should be talked about, I book the guests, and then I tell the hosts, "This is what you're going to talk about, and when." Other hosts are more or less hands on in deciding content areas.

I do have a program director, and once in a while, if they say a news story, like, "Hey, I think this is interesting, you might want to cover it." Sure, there's never any pressure, there's never any, "You will cover this." Unless it's something like the President's going to give a speech, and say, we're going to carry the speech, that's a team decision, but fundamentally, the boss decides that.

It would never be anything like we are like, "No, we're not going to talk about that." and he's like, "You are going to talk about it." kind of thing. It's, you know, we're going to cover this story ... Now, in the newsroom, obviously, like, we used to have a news director. So the news director would have decided what the news people went out and covered. Now, we have what we call morning and afternoon editors, but they're not really in charge, it's more kind of a team and everybody gets to, kind of do their own thing. But there is a person that's accountable above them, but he's pretty hands-off.

Additional context

1. (mentioned pop culture) It's funny you bring up pop culture, because I've been going through Veep ... but I have always enjoyed Mike McClintock doing Matt Walsh's relationship with the reporter from the Washington Post and like just other members of press. It definitely is exaggerated, I don't think reporters, when they hear what they don't want to hear from the PR professionals representing the President, that they just start throwing trash at them, but I think there is kinda of a funny dynamic that is sure of the times. The Washington Post guy for instance, they work together all the time, so you start to know them.
5. I've had the opportunity to talk to college kids over the years and I tell them, "Look it," and this is going back to where we are, okay? I said, "If you're looking for a nine to five job, go into PR." And there's nothing wrong with that. "But if you are to be on the other side of it, you have to have a natural curiosity about everything around you."

It goes both ways, but it's the same skillset. I tell journalism students, "If you don't become a journalist," ... because what happens in journalism is, it either eats you up and spits you out for a variety of reasons because some people just don't work well under pressure and deadlines, and someone breathing down your neck, or somebody not wanting to talk to you, or screaming at you. So, it's the same skillset. But I think, and I tell kids, "The skills you are learning will make you valuable in whatever you choose to do."

(transitioning between PR and journalism) As they gain experience, I think the people in PR that move to journalism, and please don't take this the wrong way, I think they get a little bored, and they see the variety, you know. The variety is just a little different and a little larger, you know? And I think that's what is an incentive for people to move from PR to journalism, and I've seen it done, lots of times.
7. (mentioned popular culture) It's really just Veep out there in DC and everybody is just ... Really just trying to stay at least not one step behind, you know, but they often are ... It's funny to watch it up close. It's such a ... Whispering in ears and just being like, "Oh, yeah," and just when you get to know press people better, they're efforts. They're trying and failing to get their boss to stop continually making the same mistake when they talk to reporters or something like that. You know, it's pretty funny. There's West Wing, where everything is great all the time and then there's reality. It really has changed and it's good that people are getting a more realistic view of Washington.