



By Tom Unger, APR,
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I read an Associated Press article about a natural disaster that struck the Midwest. The first three paragraphs focused on a single person whose house was heavily damaged and how he saved himself by diving into his bathtub to protect himself from flying window glass. It was only in the fourth paragraph that the reporter went on to describe how the disaster impacted four states.

Why did the reporter wait so long to discuss the disaster from a macro level? Because the topic people most want to read about in their newspaper, hear on the radio, or see on their television news is not data, statistics or numbers. It's other people.

Here's proof. Let's say the front page of your newspaper today includes three stories. One story is about the latest argument in Congress. Another is about a hospital that just opened. The third is about a widow who, due to a mistake

by the Post Office, just received 25 love letters her late husband had mailed her while he was a soldier in Europe during World War II.

Which story would you read first? Most people would be drawn to the third story about the widow. Why? I guess it's human nature. Stories about people and their lives are the most attractive to readers, viewers and listeners.

So now that you know what most people are most interested in reading about, how can you use this information to improve your articles? The answer: Incorporate a "people" element into your writing whenever possible.

Bringing stories to life

Let me give you three examples:

1. I worked at an international financial services company for 25 years in Los Angeles and Portland, Ore. A senior executive in my region was appointed to a prestigious advisory committee for a federal agency. This type of story would generally merit only a "People on the Move" type of news brief in the local newspaper.

But I injected a "people" element into the news release by pointing out that this banking executive grew up in a local, working-class family, had started his career right out of high school by working in the mailroom, and had remained with the same company for decades. I added that this appointment represented

the pinnacle of his long record of career success.

Instead of a one- or two-sentence brief, the local, daily paper ran a half-page story on the appointment, illustrated by a huge photo of the executive.

2. Whenever I pitched a story to a reporter about small business lending or a drop in mortgage rates, I would find a customer willing to be interviewed about their experience in buying a home or obtaining a loan. I would do this *before* the pitch because I knew one of the first questions a reporter would ask me is: "Do you have a customer I could talk to?"

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3. I worked for three years in communications at a major medical center in Los Angeles. Whenever we had a press conference to announce an innovative medical procedure, we would find a patient willing to be interviewed about the benefits they experienced.

Getting personal

When writing an article, consider including a personal story to bring it to life:

➔ For a new law, highlight someone

it will impact.

➔ For an employee volunteer event, feature a community member benefiting from the service.

➔ For a community grant, showcase a recipient who will benefit from the gift.

➔ For a company anniversary, interview a long-time employee.

➔ For a 401(k) participation story, feature an employee who achieved financial success through the plan.

Personal connections make stories more engaging.

There is one industry that has perfected this practice: colleges and universities.

Near graduation season, stories often surface about a grandmother returning to school or a family's first-generation college graduate.

Dig a little. Find the people's side of your story and highlight it in your writing, regardless of whether you work in external or internal communications. Any good journalist does this. You can, too. ■



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website: NewsWritingPro.com. Email: tomunger@comcast.net.

Learn More



Tom Unger, APR, Fellow PRSA, recently led a webinar titled "Boost Your News Writing Skills." This session, which includes insights on crafting high-impact news releases, is available on-demand for free to PRSA members. Visit the PRSA website for more details.

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