

Don't shoot the intern!

blogs.lse.ac.uk/polis/2008/07/09/dont-shoot-the-intern/

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American newspaper intern journalist [Jessica Da Silva](#) is not going to win any prizes in the Annual “How To Make Friends With Old Hacks” competition at the [Tampa Tribune](#). Her editor, Janet Coats, announced another round of job cuts to an unhappy newsroom which Jessica chose to report thus on her blog:

“Through most of this meeting, I just wanted to shout, “Amen!” and “You go girl!” because Janet understands what’s up. She can see the trend in the industry: Innovate or obliterate. She stressed more than several times that if newspapers don’t change then NEWSPAPERS WILL DIE.”

Now, some of her more experienced colleagues did not share Jessica’s optimistic view of how journalism can adapt to new technological realities and they said so on her blog (which got 184 comments). Some were rather petty:

“It’s sophomoric and juvenile. Clearly you have no clue about concepts such as basic spelling.”

Some were more angry:

“Wow, you really are young and naive, aren’t you? Someone sent me the link to your blog, and I almost had to laugh, it was so ridiculous. I’m truly amazed that in one of your other posts, you can tell reporters to stop whining and do something about their situation. What, praytell, young lady, would you like them to do? Let’s say you were at the Trib for 10 years and had a family to support; what would you do if you were laid off?”

Their pain is real, but many others were supportive of Jessica’s stand:

“As a journalist that was laid off last August after 13 years of service to a great newspaper, I believe that good journalists take chances, show initiative and are innovative. You’ve done all of this with your blog posting.”

“ignore all the naysayers and spelling-correctors. There’s always a lot of anger that surfaces when change happens, and people lash out at everyone and everything. The fact that you’re “just an intern” makes the old farts just feel all the more empowered to kick you around. Don’t take it personally. It is indeed a terrible thing when people lose their jobs. It’s also a terrible thing to be the person terminating all those hopes and dreams. But sometimes it just has to happen. Keep writing, keep learning, but don’t hook up your own dreams to any one industry or business model”

In a subsequent post Jessica assesses the debate she sparked off. And she makes the interesting point that her blog could have become a deliberate positive way to discuss what was happening:

“When I wrote that post, I never dreamed it would result in such a rift between journalists...The majority of us understand the importance of online journalism. Yet had it not been for my lack of anticipation, my blog post could have become a forum for discussion about the Trib’s plans, how newspapers can generate revenue on the Internet or anything else. Instead, it became a forum for name calling (on both sides). I’ve learned that when I write my blog posts, I need to try to anticipate every reaction and every feeling that might be hurt, and then decide if that is a reaction that I want to provoke.”

To me that sounds like someone who understands both journalism and its online future. Now she just needs to learn some discretion....

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