

WHEN IN DOUBT... MAKE IT EXCELLENT SEE THINK WONDER ACTIVITY

James is a senior in high school and chair of the school's weekly newspaper. James takes his responsibilities as chair seriously. He wants to put out a high-quality newspaper each week, and at the same time, wants the staff to enjoy their work. When James began to work at the paper, the motto was "When in doubt, make it up." James changed the news room culture, and now encourages staff members to feel personally accountable for their work every week. He also recently established an Association of School Journalists, the goal of which is to "encourage the study of journalism in local communities ... and serve as a forum for the exchange of administrative and editorial ideas among partner schools." He gives up a great deal for his work, including personal time, time for homework, and time for other activities. Nonetheless, he feels the experience he has gained makes it worth his time.

James is an eighteen-year-old high school senior and serves as chair of the school's weekly newspaper. As chair, he is responsible for the paper overall, and supervises the editor-in-chief. He deals with big-picture issues such as finances and policies, and he facilitates interaction between other editorial board members. James likes writing and, for the most part, he enjoys his work and his position on the paper. He finds it interesting to motivate a team, watch progress happen, and see what they can produce. Originally, he hoped his job would help him to understand his school and help him to integrate socially. For the most part, his work has given him these opportunities; at times, however, he has found himself at odds with others over particular decisions he has made as chair.

James takes his responsibilities as chair seriously. He wants to put out a high quality newspaper each week, and at the same time, wants the staff to enjoy their work. In previous years, editors joked about the "horrendous articles" they received and now, instead of ridicule, training is offered. The editor-in-chief runs weekly writing seminars with a faculty member who used to be a journalist. Together, the group examines the preceding week's paper for problems and solutions, and they work together on the coming week's assignments. The seminars focus on a different theme each

week: interviewing, editorial writing, sports writing, etc. In this way, writers and editors come to the sessions that most interest them. According to James, the workshops have helped a great deal. People used to be intimidated about writing for the paper, and the workshops seem to have eliminated this fear.

When James began work at the paper, the motto was “when in doubt, make it up.” James changed the newsroom’s culture, and now encourages staff members to feel personally accountable for their work every week. He explains:

“The way I’ve learned the value of integrity and the value of responsibility has really been through being irresponsible and not maintaining a high level of integrity [through the example set by a previous staffer on the newspaper]. There are times where we’ve [been told by editors] to cut corners ... [and] from that point, I said, ‘Absolutely not.’ I think that’s how I learned what’s going to govern this, or what’s going to keep people here every week, and what’s going to drive the work we do and how [we] are ... going to be accountable. And I think self-integrity has allowed us to say, ‘How am I personally going to be accountable for what comes out every week?’”

James considers himself lucky because writers want to attend the newly instituted writing workshops, and editors have been willing to work long hours. These students “take a very serious interest in their own work.” James feels that it is important that the staff understand that, regardless of a given position, anyone who wants to have a job can do so. He believes that anyone with valuable information should share it. He offers the example of a copy editor who had information about advertising, but didn’t offer it because he thought his position made it inappropriate to do so. Now, James believes, the environment at the paper is more open than it has been previously, and there seems to be “less hierarchy.”

Working with a community paper, James explains, is different from working for a commercial paper. Choosing which stories to cover takes a great deal of effort. He can’t simply print a “great story,” but must take into consideration who is affected by its printing. Subjects may be classmates or teachers, and he tries to ensure they are always treated with respect. James has concerns about where to draw the line between straight reporting and community reporting. He often finds more reason to focus on the positive, which doesn’t necessarily follow the journalistic standard

of objective reporting. “Heavy stories” on racist graffiti or alleged rapes on campus are not what the community wants to read about, and James finds that trying to get honest details about a story can be difficult.

Because of these kinds of challenges, James recently established an Association of School Journalists to reach out to students who don’t have the same resources and support as students at his school. The goal of the association is to “reach out to the community ... encourage the study of journalism in local communities ... and serve as a forum for the exchange of administrative and editorial ideas among partner schools ... which will provide a means for schools to share coverage of news, sports, and arts events.” James happily reports that several local high school students have participated in writing workshops. James is satisfied that although this initiative is just beginning in his last year at the school, it will continue and be something from which both his school and other local schools will benefit. He is content to know that he has contributed in some form or another to the future success of his school’s paper.

James recognizes the “broad spectrum of life skills” he’s learning: how to work with a budget, how to manage a staff, and how to balance friendship with professional relationships. Because there is a minimal amount of adult involvement on the newspaper, he is often confronted with problems that he doesn’t know how to solve. He learns through trial and error, keeping in mind at all times his responsibility as a journalist and as a manager. James believes that he learns more from negotiating difficult situations as chair—which stories to cover, tension between writers and editors, interacting with the broader community of the school—than he has in his three previous years on the paper. James gives up a great deal for this work, including personal time, time for homework, and time for other activities. Nonetheless, he feels the experience he has gained makes it worth his time.

James is undecided about his career plans. Journalism has allowed him to explore other areas, such as business, editing, writing, and management. He likes the combination of journalism, management, and working with people to solve problems, and is considering a career in diplomacy.

NAME:

DATE:

**WHEN IN DOUBT... MAKE IT EXCELLENT
SEE THINK WONDER ACTIVITY**

What do you see in this narrative? What do you notice?

What does the narrative make you think about? Does it relate at all to your own life?

What does the situation make you wonder? Do you have unanswered questions?

WHAT DO YOU SEE?

WHAT DO YOU THINK?

WHAT DO YOU WONDER?

NAME:

DATE:

THE
GOOD
PROJECT



**WHEN IN DOUBT... MAKE IT EXCELLENT
SEE THINK WONDER ACTIVITY**

HOW DO YOU SEE JAMES'S WORK RELATING TO EACH OF THE "3 ES"?

HOW WOULD YOU DO "GOOD WORK" IF YOU WERE JAMES?

WHAT WOULD IT LOOK LIKE IF JAMES DID NOT DO GOOD WORK?
