



## HANDBOOK OF JOURNALISM

### Introduction

Everything we do as an MCL journalist has to be independent, free from bias and executed with the utmost integrity. These are our core values.

As a real-time, competitive news service whose reputation rests on reliability, we also value accuracy, speed and exclusivity. The way in which we, as MCL employees, live these values is governed by the MCL Code of Conduct.

### *The 10 Absolutes of MCL Journalism*

- Always hold accuracy sacrosanct
- Always correct an error openly
- Always strive for balance and freedom from bias
- Always reveal a conflict of interest to a manager
- Always respect privileged information
- Always protect their sources from the authorities
- Always guard against putting their opinion in a news story
- Never fabricate or plagiarise
- Never alter a still or moving image beyond the requirements of normal image enhancement
- Never pay for a story and never accept a bribe

### Corrections

MCL is transparent about errors. We rectify them promptly and clearly, whether in a story, a caption, a graphic or a script. We do not disguise or bury corrections in subsequent leads or stories.

## **Sourcing**

Accuracy entails honesty in sourcing. Our reputation for that accuracy, and for freedom from bias, rests on the credibility of our sources. An MCL journalist is always the best source on a witnessed event. A named source is always preferable to an unnamed source. We should never deliberately mislead in our sourcing, quote a source saying one thing on the record and something contradictory on background, or cite sources in the plural when we have only one. Anonymous sources are the weakest sources.

### **Here are some handy tips:**

- Use named sources wherever possible because they are responsible for the information they provide, even though we remain liable for accuracy, balance and legal dangers. Press your sources to go on the record.
- MCL will use unnamed sources where necessary when they provide information of market or public interest that is not available on the record. We alone are responsible for the accuracy of such information.
- When talking to sources, always make sure the ground rules are clear. Take notes and record interviews.
- Cross-check information wherever possible. Two or more sources are better than one. In assessing information from unnamed sources, weigh the source's track record, position and motive. Use your common sense. If it sounds wrong, check further.
- Talk to sources on all sides of a deal, dispute, negotiation or conflict.
- Be honest in sourcing and in obtaining information. Give as much context and detail as you can about sources, whether named or anonymous, to authenticate information they provide. Be explicit about what you don't know.
- MCL will publish news from a single, anonymous source in exceptional cases, when it is credible information from a trusted source with direct knowledge of the situation. Single-source stories are subject to a special authorisation procedure.
- A source's compact is with MCL, not with the reporter. If asked on legitimate editorial grounds, you are expected to disclose your source to your supervisor. Protecting the confidentiality of sources, by both the reporter and supervisor, is paramount.
- When doing initiative reporting, try to disprove as well as prove your story.

- Accuracy always comes first. It's better to be late than wrong. Before pushing the button, think how you would withstand a challenge or a denial.
- Know your sources well. Consider carefully if the person you are communicating with is an imposter. Sources can provide information by whatever means available – telephone, in person, email, instant messaging, text message. But be aware that any communication can be interfered with.
- MCL will stand by a reporter who has followed the sourcing guidelines and the proper approval procedures.

## **Quotes**

Quotes are sacrosanct. They must never be altered other than to delete a redundant word or clause, and then only if the deletion does not alter the sense of the quote in any way. Selective use of quotes can be unbalanced. Be sure that quotes you use are representative of what the speaker is saying and that you describe body language (a smile or a wink) that may affect the sense of what is being reported. When quoting an individual always give the context or circumstances of the quote.

It is not our job to make people look good by cleaning up inelegant turns of phrase, nor is it our job to expose them to ridicule by running such quotes. In most cases, this dilemma can be resolved by paraphrase and reported speech. Where it cannot, reporters should consult a more senior journalist to discuss whether the quote can be run verbatim. Correcting a grammatical error in a quote may be valid, but rewording an entire phrase is not. When reporting quotes from a non-native English speaker, we should do so in an idiomatic way rather than with pedantic literalness. Care must be taken to ensure that the tone of the translation is equivalent to the tone of the original.

## **Reflecting reality**

Accuracy means that our images and stories must reflect reality. It can be tempting for journalists to “hype” or sensationalise material, skewing the reality of the situation or misleading the reader or viewer into assumptions and impressions that are wrong and potentially harmful. A “flood” of immigrants, for example, may in reality be a relatively small number of people just as a “surge” in a stock price may be a quite modest rise. Stopping to think, and to discuss, how we use words leads to more precise journalism and also minimises the potential for harm. Similarly, no actions in visual journalism

should be taken that add to or detract from the reality of images. In some circumstances, this may constitute fabrication and can cause serious damage to our reputation. Such actions may lead to disciplinary measures, including dismissal.

### **Datelines and bylines**

Accuracy is paramount in our use of datelines and bylines. Readers assume that the byline shows the writer was at the dateline. We should byline stories only from datelines where the writer (or the reporter being written up on a desk) was present. Reporters or freelancers who have contributed to a report should be included in an additional reporting line at the end of the story, giving their name and location.

### **Attribution**

Accuracy means proper attribution to the source of material that is not ours, whether in a story, a photograph or moving images. Our customers and the public rely on us to be honest about where material has originated. It allows them to assess the reliability.

It is insufficient simply to label video or a photograph as “handout”. We should clearly identify the source – for example “Greenpeace Video” or “U.S. Army Photo”. Similarly, it is essential for transparency that material we did not gather ourselves is clearly attributed in stories to the source, including when that source is a rival organisation. Failure to do so may open us to charges of plagiarism.

### **Reporting rumours**

MCL aims to report the facts, not rumours. Clients rely on us to differentiate between fact and rumour and our reputation rests partly on that.

### **Independence**

Independence is the essence of our reputation as a “stateless” global news organisation and fundamental to the trust that allows us to report impartially. It is crucial to our ability to report on companies, institutions and individuals, many of whom are also our customers, without regard for anything other than accuracy, balance and the truth. Our independence stems not only from the fundamental values of MCL, but also from our duty as journalists to avoid conflicts of interest or situations that could give rise to a perception of a

conflict. What follows is not an exhaustive list of conflicts that might arise. If you think that there is a potential for conflict in any of your activities you should raise this with your manager.

### **Declaring financial interests**

Whether you are reporting news, financial information or other subjects you should ensure that no circumstances exist which could give rise to a suspicion of bias on the part of MCL. The changing industry and regulatory environments make it clear that we need to hold ourselves to a higher standard in order to protect and grow the reputation of MCLs for accurate, unbiased journalism.

### **Work outside MCL**

You may not engage in paid work outside MCL unless your manager has given you permission in advance. This would include, for example, writing a book or articles, addressing a conference or commercial or news photography. Permission will be routinely granted if the activities do not affect MCL.

### **Checking back with sources**

MCL never routinely submits stories, scripts or images to sources to vet before publication. This breaches our independence. We may, of our own volition, check back with a source to verify a quote or to satisfy ourselves about the reliability of factual information but we also need to ensure that in doing so we do not give sources an opportunity to retract or materially alter a quote or information to their advantage.

Interview subjects or their organisations or companies sometimes ask to see the quotes we plan to publish or broadcast before they are issued. We should resist such requests where possible. If we do have to submit quotes for approval, we should not agree to a quote being materially changed. It is often effective to give the source a tight deadline for approval.

### **Gifts and entertainment**

MCL reminds journalists that they must not accept any payment, gift, service or benefit (whether in cash or in kind) offered by a news source or contact. In some societies it is traditional to offer or receive gifts on special occasions, such as secular or religious holidays. To refuse such a gift may cause offence and in weighing what to do, a journalist must be mindful of a society's culture and traditions. A good test of whether to accept the gift or politely decline is

the value of the item. A traditional gift of purely nominal value may be appropriate to accept. A gift of more than nominal value should be declined, using an explanation of our policies. If a gift of some value proves impossible to decline, it should be surrendered to the journalist's manager for donation to a suitable charity. If you cannot decide whether the gift is of greater than nominal value, assume that it is. Staff in any doubt about how to behave should discuss the appropriate action with their manager.

In the course of gathering news, journalists are often invited to breakfasts, luncheons or dinners. As long as such occasions are newsworthy, it may be appropriate to accept the hospitality provided it is within reason. We do not accept "junkets" – events that have little if any value to our newsgathering such as an invitation to a free holiday, an evening's entertainment or a sporting event at the expense of a news source. Accepting such hospitality when there is no news value might well be seen to create an unreasonable obligation to the source.

### **Travel and accommodation**

News sources, often companies, will sometimes offer journalists free transport or accommodation to get to cover a story. Our standard position is that we pay our own way and make our own travel arrangements. If that is impractical or will restrict access to sources, you must consult your manager about the offer. Permission will normally be given only if the story warrants coverage and to insist on paying would be impractical.

In exceptional circumstances, it may be impossible to get to the news without accepting free travel or accommodation. Again, journalists must obtain permission from their manager to proceed. The manager needs to weigh such factors as access, newsworthiness and the potential for a conflict (what if there is no story out of the trip?).

### **Bribes and other inducements**

Under no circumstances should we take or offer payment (whether in cash or in kind) for a news story. Such action is a grave breach of our ethics, undermines our independence and can lead to disciplinary action including dismissal. Journalists also need to weigh how they entertain sources. We clearly need to take sources out for a meal or out for a drink in pursuit of the news and encourage our journalists to do so. Such entertainment, however,

should not go beyond the bounds of normal, basic hospitality and needs to be in line with the MCL policy on bribery, corruption, gifts and entertainment.

### **Freedom from bias**

MCL journalists must always strive to be scrupulously fair and balanced. Allegations should not be portrayed as fact; charges should not be conveyed as a sign of guilt. We have a duty of fairness to give the subjects of such stories the opportunity to put their side.

### **Take no side, tell all sides**

As MCL journalists, we never identify with any side in an issue, a conflict or a dispute. Our text and visual stories need to reflect all sides, not just one. This leads to better journalism because it requires us to stop at each stage of newsgathering and ask ourselves “What do I know?” This objectivity does not always come down to giving equal space to all sides. We must, however, always strive to be scrupulously fair and balanced.

We must also be on guard against bias in our choice of words. Words like “claimed” or “according to” can suggest we doubt what is being said, although their use in product news is acceptable. Words like “fears” or “hopes” might suggest we are taking sides. Verbs like rebut or refute (which means to disprove) or like fail (as in failed to comment) can imply an editorial judgment and are best avoided. Thinking about language can only improve our writing and our journalism.

### **Opinion and Analysis**

MCL makes a fundamental distinction between our factual news stories and clearly-labelled opinion pieces.

MCL journalists do not express their opinions in news stories, voiced video or scripts, or on blogs or chat rooms they may contribute to in the course of their work.

This is not to say that other people’s opinions have no place in our stories. They are very often relevant to the story and are essential for the reader or viewer to understand its meaning and consequences. For that to hold true, quoted opinion must be authoritative and be attributed to a named source.

We risk biased reporting if we allow an unnamed source to say, for example, “I believe Company X is on the path to strong revenue growth and see its stock rising by 20 per cent over the next six months.” We have no protection in such a case against the charge that we are working in the interests of unnamed sources to talk up a stock that their firms may have a substantial interest in. We do enjoy that protection if we write: “I believe Company X is on the path to strong revenue growth and see its stock rising by 20 per cent over next six months,” said Joe Mo, a senior equities analyst at Manchuk Fund Manager which holds 7.3 per cent of the company’s share capital.

## **Equal Opportunity in the Newsroom**

MCL is committed to treating its employees fairly, regardless of gender, ethnic, national or religious background, age, disability, marital status, parental status or sexual orientation. Qualified employees will be given consideration for all job openings regardless of any of the above. The selection of employees included for entry to the company, for training, development and promotion should be determined solely on their skills, abilities and other requirements which are relevant to the job and in accordance with the laws in the country concerned.

## **Media Interviews and Speaking Engagements**

MCL staff are sometimes asked by other organisations give interviews or speak at events. We encourage such exposure for our journalists and their expertise. If journalists are willing to be interviewed, they should adhere to the following principles:

- Any interviews have to be approved in advance by the journalist’s manager.
- The request must come from a credible news organisation or industry body that is unlikely to use the interview for MCL endorsement purposes.
- Correspondents must not give personal opinions and should confine themselves largely to what has been reported by MCL.
- Correspondents should say nothing that could provoke controversy, embarrass MCL, undermine our reputation for objectivity and impartiality, impair our reporting access or jeopardise staff.
- We must be satisfied that the correspondent is an experienced member of staff upon whom we can rely to act with responsibility and discretion.
- We only allow brief interviews that impinge little on correspondents’ time and do not disrupt their reporting.



- Payment should not be sought. If received, we recommend that it be paid to your charity of choice.

## **Conferences**

MCL editorial staff may attend or speak about their areas of journalistic expertise at seminars, conferences and other forums with the approval of MCL managers:

When participating on such panels, a MCL journalist should stick to facts or fact-based analysis. Participation in events sponsored by educational institutions, non-governmental organisations (NGOs), government entities and the like must be approved by an editor in charge.

Following are some general principles that will help determine whether approval may be given for MCL editorial staff to participate in a conference:

- Journalists can moderate panels only if MCL has complete editorial control over the content of questions.
- Journalists will not moderate or participate in panels if any of the panelists have paid the host to participate or are representatives of third-party sponsors.
- Journalists will not moderate or participate in panels whose primary aim is to launch or sell a product.
- Editors can only appear once a year at a particular company's conferences.
- Journalists who participate will not offer opinions on specific companies or competitors, but stick to facts and analysis (preferably those already reported by MCL or other credible media outlets) and a discussion of general topics and trends.

## **Integrity**

All employees have a responsibility to ensure that the reputation of MCL retains its high standing with whomever we come into contact. As a member of the MCL team, you are expected to accept certain responsibilities, adhere to acceptable professional standards in matters of personal conduct and exhibit a high degree of personal integrity at all times. When operating outside of your home country, you must also have due regard for all relevant local legislation and regulations and act with appropriate respect for local culture and custom.

## **Acting within the law**

One of the fundamental things that we try to do at MCL is to ensure that we are aware of and comply with the many different laws, rules and standards of conduct that apply to us in all the countries where we operate.

In gathering the news, we must ensure that we do so in a way that is legal and above board. Purloining data and documents, breaking into premises, electronic eavesdropping, telephone taps, computer hacking and defeating passwords or other security methods on internet websites are all illicit and should not be used in the course of our work.

## **Identifying ourselves as journalists**

MCL journalists do not obtain news by deception. We identify ourselves at all times as working for MCL. We do not pass ourselves off as something other than a journalist, nor do we pretend to be from other news organisations.

Circumstances may arise when an assumption is made about who we are. It may be appropriate to allow that assumption to persist in the interests of news gathering. In all cases, we must identify ourselves as MCL journalists if challenged.

## **Reporting from the Internet**

We are committed to aggressive journalism in all its forms, including in the field of computer-assisted reporting, but we draw the line at illegal behaviour. Internet reporting is nothing more than applying the principles of sound journalism to the sometimes unusual situations thrown up in the virtual world. The same standards of sourcing, identification and verification apply. Take the same precautions online as you would in other forms of newsgathering and do not use anything from the Internet that is not sourced in such a way that you can verify where it came from.

## **Dealing with sources**

Sources must be cultivated by being professionally polite and fair. The MCL Code of Conduct applies when it comes to relationships with sources that involve gifts, travel, and opportunities that result from inside information. The basic rule is that we pay our own way. We encourage staff to cultivate sources but also expect them to be conscious of the need to maintain a detachment from them. We should not cultivate or associate with sources on one side of an

issue to a point where there are grounds to question whether the relationship has exceeded the bounds of proper, professional contact. While it is appropriate to entertain sources, including outside working hours, regularly spending substantial leisure time with them may raise a potential conflict or a perception of bias. A good measure of the propriety of the relationship is to ask whether you would be comfortable spending as much time with another source on a different side of the issue or your beat. If in doubt, seek guidance from your manager.

### **Dealing with customers**

Many of our customers are often also our news sources or the subjects of the news we report. Our relationship with them should be governed by the professional behaviours required of journalists. It is essential in our dealings with clients that we should be courteous, helpful and attentive when they approach us with concerns or questions about our news service or about specific reports. We also need to pay attention in our dealings with clients as journalists to the clear line that separates the editorial and commercial functions of MCL. While we may discuss news issues and the news functionality of our products, it would be inappropriate for journalists to negotiate sales contracts with clients or potential customers.

We should avoid misrepresenting ourselves to clients, avoid defaming our competitors and avoid encouraging clients to divulge information about them in a manner that would breach their obligation to those competitors.

### **Dealing with competitors**

MCL engages in vigorous competition to report the news first and best. At the same time, we compete fairly, without placing obstacles in the way of our competitors. We want information about our competitors but must take care that the way we collect that information, and how we share it and use it, is not improper or illegal. We acknowledge when our competitors obtain exclusive news that is of value to our customers by attributing it to them clearly in pickups, just as we would expect from them.

We do not “do deals” with our competitors on covering the news, trade material with them or divulge information to rivals about editorial or corporate policies and operations.

## **Dealing with complaints**

The MCL reputation for getting it right and reporting it fairly is something we should be proud of. It is a key part of attracting and keeping clients. Sometimes we do get it wrong, and it is important for our reputation to fix it when we do. Responding promptly and properly to complaints that we have not been accurate, balanced or ethical can avoid what could become costly legal problems, or widespread bad publicity. Complaints from any quarter – a source, a client, a member of the industry – must be investigated promptly so that immediate corrective action can be taken if it proves to be well founded. Complaints that cannot be immediately investigated must be acknowledged at once and followed up quickly. They should be handled at a senior level within MCL.

Remember throughout the process of dealing with complaints that attitude counts. Getting mad or sounding overtly hostile may only make the person raising an issue more determined to press forward and less inclined to listen to what we have to say. It may help if you try to think of what you're hearing as feedback or constructive criticism, rather than simply a complaint.

## **Dealing with the authorities**

Any requests for published or unpublished MCLs content (e.g. video, copies of stories, photographs or journalists' notes or other background materials) from police, security forces, tribunals and the like or from lawyers or individuals involved in civil or criminal court proceedings should be referred to a senior editor who should alert the legal department.

## **Dealing with each other**

Teamwork is crucial to our success at MCL and one of our greatest strengths. Joint planning and cooperation by staff in all disciplines – text, news and graphics – is not only expected, but is required if we are to take full advantage of our position. We share information, ideas, non-confidential contacts and the burden of coverage.

MCL supports the right of every employee in editorial to contribute ideas, suggestions and positive criticisms of what we do and how we do it. The Company also recognises that every employee has the right to work in an environment free from harassment, intimidation or offensive behaviour and one in which any issue of harassment will be resolved without reprisal or breach of confidentiality. Staff should feel able to raise concerns about

standards and ethics and report any perceived breach of our high standards to their manager without fear of recrimination. All employees are expected to take personal responsibility for upholding our standards by treating with dignity and respect, all job applicants, fellow employees, customers, contract and temporary personnel and any other individuals associated with MCL.

### **Reporting incidents**

The internal reporting of serious incidents involving harm or risk to staff, significant problems with stories or images, hoaxes and allegations of improper behaviour is an important part of any manager's job. Non-managerial staff who become aware of any such incident must report it to their supervisor. The reporting of such incidents is essential to keep senior company officials up to date on situations that affect staff and operations or which have the potential to embarrass MCL or affect the company's reputation.

### **Life outside MCL News & Media**

MCL staff are permitted to make incidental personal use of MCL e-mail and other communications facilities, including the Internet. As members of editorial, however, we have a special responsibility to ensure that there can be no confusion between our professional activities and our private interests or personal opinions. For example, expressions of political opinion or investment advice in e-mails sent on company systems to outside addresses breach our Code of Conduct in so far as they identify MCL with a cause or position. They can result in disciplinary action, including dismissal.

Staff should not conduct private correspondence using company stationery. They should not use their position as a journalist to obtain benefits and advantages that are not available to the general public. Exceptions include discounts and privileges negotiated by the company for all staff or discounts that are generally available to all journalists in a given country. Here too, however, editorial employees need to recognise the potential for a perceived conflict of interest and should consult their manager if they have doubts. Common sense is often the best guide in such cases.

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