ELEVEN ELEMENTS OF EXCELLENCE

At The Seattle Times, serving the community with quality journalism is our passion and our mission. We begin with our readers in mind, taking on topics that lead to understanding, provide innovative and useful information and contribute to quality of life. Whether the issue is health, safety, environment, social justice or public trust, we gauge a story's value by asking, "Will this story make a difference to our readers and our community? And how do we accomplish that?"

The "Eleven Elements of Excellence" guide us from story idea to end result. These are the principles we ask our reporters and editors to live by:

Work with purpose and with passion. Know why you're doing what you're doing. If you're not sure, ask. Don't be afraid to challenge an assignment or an assumption - if you have a better idea. Our mandate is not to shoot down ideas, but to consider a variety and choose the best. Ask yourself and others: "What good does it do?" Once the path is chosen, go at it with gusto.

First identify questions, then find answers. Good journalism always starts with clear questions. Work from questions, not from conclusions, and be open to finding answers that will surprise you and readers.

Have a point, and make it. Readers should not have to struggle to understand what we're trying to say with a story, photo or graphic. Help them. Write with clarity and with the authority earned by good, thorough, unbiased reporting and editing. Strive for crisp and active leads, strong summary paragraphs, jargonless language and unified story packages that bring headlines, cutlines, photos and graphics together in powerful harmony.

Be first and best. Our heritage as an afternoon newspaper gives us a strong foundation as a morning paper to beat the competition in both the urgency and quality of our reporting. Whenever possible, get tomorrow's news into tomorrow's paper. Anticipate what will be covered by other media and go beyond that. Give readers depth and understanding they can't get anywhere else, and help them understand what's likely to happen next.

Leave the pack behind. When a crowd of reporters and photographers is headed in one direction, that's often a signal to us to go another. Chances are there's a great, counterintuitive story or photograph to be had by taking the road less traveled. Look for patterns in news, and look for ways to distinguish the significant from the trivial. Emphasize the "why" of news,
and provide the context to help readers understand how it affects them.

**Be fiercely independent.** Hold those with power accountable and call readers to action. Look for stories that compel readers and community leaders to act. Challenge authority. Give voice to the powerless. Right wrongs.

**Help build community.** In our increasingly diverse and fragmented world, we have a special role and opportunity to bring people together. Look for those threads - social, cultural, emotional - that transcend race, age, religion, politics and geography.

**Venture from your comfort zone.** Seek out perspectives different than your own, both in the newsroom and in the community. Take advantage of and honor our diversity.

**Respect readers, each other and yourself.** Our readers are intelligent, informed, active people. Our work should show we respect their intelligence and their time. The way we work should show we respect each other. And the quality of our work and our conduct should show we respect ourselves. Central to that respect is commitment to accuracy, ethics and integrity.

**Think rain, trees, fish, airplanes, software and coffee.** We live in one of the world's remarkable places, and the pages of our newspaper should reflect that each and every day. Our readers should be able to pick up the paper and know instantly: This ain't Indianapolis. Each day, we should strive to provide a sense of place, to introduce readers to important and interesting people, to be the authoritative voice on the news of the day, to be the national leader on our franchise coverage areas.

**Take risks – and have fun.** Every day, push yourself and your colleagues to do better journalism. Today's standards are a platform, not a destination. Together, let's push our profession to new levels. We'll have fun doing it, and readers will sense our enjoyment and share in it.