



The Case for Good News

Reporting on positive news can go far beyond fuzzy “human interest” stories. It can spur real, meaningful change. So why aren’t more media outlets doing it?

By Arianna Huffington as told to Elaine Lipworth Illustration by Patrick Leger

THERE IS AN overwhelming bias in global media towards the mentality of “If it bleeds, it leads.” But focusing entirely on what’s broken in the world is lousy journalism, giving readers a jaundiced view of reality. If we in the media only show the dark side, we’re failing at our jobs. I believe it is our responsibility to our readers to give them the full picture. Good news is important. Without it, we deprive ourselves of an enormous part of the human experience. We know that when we endlessly run stories of a school shooting, for example, we can create copycat crimes. But I believe we can create copycat solutions. By putting the spotlight on good things that are happening, we will encourage others to replicate the positive.

Let me make this clear: It is, of course, our responsibility in media to cover all the crises in the world. At The Huffington Post, we’re writing about beheadings, rapes, political dysfunction, corruption, wrongdoing, tragedy

and disaster as relentlessly as we always have. But we also have a great responsibility to cover what is working: the ingenuity, the compassion and the innovation.

That’s why I’ve recently asked our editors to make our “What’s Working” initiative a priority. Sure, there are stories about cute animals, but I’m talking about start-ups that are creating jobs, about solutions to problems like gun violence. Stories like those don’t just make us feel good; they have a real impact on how we address crises.

All human beings are a mixture of good and evil, and when we read about people who are operating from a place of generosity and compassion, it encourages the best in us. So our German edition featured the story of a Danish city that’s finding new ways to reach out to its Muslim population. We’ve been covering the decriminalisation of drugs and criminal justice reform in the U.S., the efforts to move away from treating drug addiction as a crime.

And in Greece, we told how specially trained miniature horses are helping hospital-bound children reduce stress and heal.

We hope that with stories like these we can create a positive contagion. Not only is this possible; readers hunger for it. In 2013, Jonah Berger, a professor at Wharton Business School and author of *Contagious: Why Things Catch On*, and his colleague Katherine Milkman dug into *The New York Times*’ list of the most e-mailed stories over the course of six months. They found that people were more likely to share stories that stirred positive feelings.

So why isn’t there more focus on good news? Traditional media often suffer from attention deficit disorder. They cover a news story and move on. But I believe that we have the responsibility to stay on a story and to keep developing it until we break through the static. For example, it’s only when gun violence is on a crescendo that everyone writes

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WORKING IT OUT

*The Huffington Post, which in May marked the 10th anniversary of its launch, has embraced the “What’s Working” initiative. Arianna Huffington urges readers to explore what’s working in their own lives in her latest book, **Thrive: The Third Metric to Redefining Success and Creating a Life of Well-Being, Wisdom, and Wonder.***

about it. But there’s value in staying on the story until you can share solutions. At HuffPost, we recently covered Los Angeles’ dramatic decline in gun violence, which has barely been written about anywhere else.

To allow stories like these to evolve and to keep our lens on positive news, we have a team of dedicated editors who publish constructive stories in every section, from technology to politics to religion to business. Since it’s a global editorial initiative, “What’s Working” is present in each of our 13 international editions and is overseen by an executive editor. We invite our readers to send us ideas of what’s working and to participate in the debate—they may even want to blog about it.

Our brave new world of digital media has opened up new channels and brought new voices to the conversation. Our mission at HuffPost is a hybrid one: We’re a Pulitzer Prize-winning journalism enterprise with investigative reporters all around the world, and we’re a platform where people both known and unknown with something interesting to say can say it. We make it clear which stories are done by our own reporters and which are blogs from our readers.

But part of what allows us to focus on the broadest range possible of positive news is that we have no hierarchy in our editorial model. On the front page, a post by French president François Hollande can appear next to a post by a college student with a good idea. As blogging has gone from something “less than” to an essential and respected form of storytelling, it has opened up new opportunities for writers, as other media outlets have also discovered. There’s more than one way to add value to readers’ lives. Readers value professional, reported, fact-checked journalism, and they also value stories made possible by all the new tools at our disposal. Blogging allows them to share their own positive stories.

We want to help “What’s Working” become more widespread, so I’m excited that we’re working with students at Annenberg School of Journalism and other schools, asking them

to look at journalism with a 360-degree view.

Our editors are encouraging students to apply the same reportorial rigour and creativity to “What’s Working” as they do to their reporting on what isn’t. Our hope is that by instilling these values early on, we can help to shape a new generation of journalists for whom reporting on solutions is second nature.

In addition to ensuring it’s reported skilfully, another consideration for those sharing positive news is to ask ourselves what we want our readers to do next. Our goal with all our stories is to have an impact. So we’re partnering with groups like Global Citizen to make it easy for readers to take meaningful action (donate to a cause, contact a politician) immediately after reading a story or watching a video that moves them.

I know we aren’t the first journalists to report on positive news. We’re working within a very rich tradition. Some of the finest reporting through the years has focused on solutions. But now we want to pave the way for other news organisations around the world to show the full picture of what’s happening. As more outlets join us, that’s when transformation will happen.

Given how far we’ve travelled at HuffPost—and across the world of media—in the past 10 years, it’s impossible to imagine where we might go in the next 10. As we continue to grow, we’ll be using all the tools at our disposal not only to tell the most important stories, but also to help people tell their own stories. I have faith in the power of conversations. The online world is now a global conversation, with millions of new people pulling up a seat at the table every day. Nearly 3 billion people will join the internet community by 2020. By starting conversations and enabling new connections, I think it’s possible for the media to do some good. ■

*Arianna Huffington is the chair, president and editor-in-chief of The Huffington Post Media Group. She’s the author of 14 books, including **Thrive: The Third Metric to Redefining Success and Creating a Life of Well-Being, Wisdom, and Wonder.***