

# Is Your Institutional Knowledge Walking Out the Door?

Using Oral History Techniques to Preserve Your  
Newspaper's History

# Why has preserving institutional knowledge become important at many newspapers?

---

- Rapid change
- Job specialization, fewer people have vast knowledge of multiple systems or of historical roots
- Departure of long-time employees due to retirement, downsizing, restructuring

# Who holds your institutional knowledge?

---

- Employees who have been with your news organization for 20, 30, 40 years or more - they've seen true evolution in newsroom technologies, processes and management
- Employees who may not have been there as long but who have overseen critical projects during their tenure with your organizations

# Tools or Techniques for Preserving Knowledge

---

- Written questionnaires
- Audio interviews
- Video interviews

# Sample questions that could easily lead to further discussion

---

- *Talk a little about the changes in technology you've seen over the years.* I would say that in graphics and design the development of technology played a huge role in bringing the craft to the level it is being thought of today. Obviously, the physical changes that cold type and color presses and finally the computer brought were monumental factors in driving redesigns through the last 35 years. But at a more subtle level the impact it had on the role of the visual journalist was unprecedented.
- *Which technologies do you think moved us forward the most?*  
The color press and the offset printing process.

From Tony Majeri, our long-time innovation guru at the Tribune

# Sample questions that could easily lead to further discussion

---

- *How do you feel journalism and the news industry in general changed during the years you worked here?*  
I think the passion is not the same but the skills in the newsroom are much higher.

From Tony Majeri, our long-time innovation guru at the Tribune

# Other sample questions

---

- Who were your managers in the positions you held here?
- Were there special people who took on roles as mentors to you during your career? What did you learn from those mentors?
- When you moved from one position to another, what prompted those moves?
- Were you happy with each of the positions you held, or was there one that captured your heart and truly let you shine? If so, what was it about that one position that brought your passion to life?
- Can you identify 3-5 of the most interesting people you interviewed or photographed during your career with the Tribune? What was it about these people that moved you or inspired you?

# Look for unique sources of oral history content for your collection

---

- Interviews that have been conducted with staff members
- Internal collections of biographical materials, profiles
- Award ceremonies



# A Unique Source of Content in Chicago: Awards and Anniversaries: Tribune's Beck Awards Video of Tribune veterans

- This video is from 2001 and is of 30 year veterans who began their Tribune careers in 1970

# Awards for achievement and anniversaries

---

- Wide range of interviewees adds interesting perspectives and depth to historical knowledge of your news organization
- Video interview packages with edited content from a number of company veterans
- Raw, unedited footage of interviews with those veterans

# Tackling an Oral History Project is a Win-Win Endeavor

---

- Your news organization wins because it holds onto a tremendous amount of knowledge and can learn from the past
- Employees leaving your organization leave with a feeling of being appreciated, of knowing that their work and their thoughts have made a difference

# Oral History Resources

---

- UC - Berkeley Library Bibliography  
<http://bancroft.berkeley.edu/ROHO/resources/bib.html>
- Oral History Association:  
[http://omega.dickinson.edu/organizations/oha/public\\_eg.html](http://omega.dickinson.edu/organizations/oha/public_eg.html)
- Columbia University Oral History Research Office:  
<http://www.columbia.edu/cu/lweb/div/oral/>

# Is Your Institutional Knowledge Walking Out the Door?

Using Oral History Techniques to Preserve Your  
Newspaper's History