

Lexington Herald-Leader Credibility Roundtable
Facilitator's Guide and Response Sheet
April 15, 2001

5:30 Allow for lateness

5:35 Welcome, purpose, introductions (Pam serves as MC)

Welcome: Pam

[This is part of the National Credibility Roundtables project, sponsored by the Associated Press Managing Editors and funded by the Ford Foundation.]

Purpose: Pam

[The project's goal is to increase the credibility of American newspapers by having community discussions about coverage of controversial topics of local concern — in this case, coverage of local schools. What coverage do readers consider credible or not credible, and why? What could *The Herald-Leader* do to improve the credibility of its reporting and editorializing? Is the newspaper's coverage meeting the needs and expectations of readers?]

Introductions: Pam, Rona

Pam: introduce Rona

Rona: manage introductions of five groups:

Each of the five groups stands for a moment: (announce what the groups are, then ask people to stand when group is repeated; if confused, stand more than once)

Students and Parents

Central Office Administrators, school board members, former school board members

Journalists

School Level People — Teachers and Principals

Guest observers

Rona also asks: Will each of you introduce yourselves to two people near you whom you don't know?

5:50 Whole group: Rona explains process

Each of four groups will come to the inner circle (on stage) for about 20 minutes, and will answer similar questions about the credibility of the *Herald Leader's* coverage of local school issues. The four groups are (1) students and parents; (2) FCPS central office administrators; (3) teachers and principals; and (4) journalists from the *Herald-Leader*. You will not necessarily be in that order — we are going to draw lots to determine the order of the groups.

After the four groups has each taken a turn in the center, we will consider together as a whole group what your best advice to the *Herald-Leader* is. You will not need to reach consensus, though I may check for it from time to time, in order to gauge the breadth of a particular point of view.

We will finish at 8:30. We will take a short break after the first group's turn in the inner circle for everyone to get boxed meals. Before that, please help yourself to refreshments. Relax and make this informal.

Pam: The *Herald-Leader* guarantee about how this session will be treated in the future:

[Because the goal of this discussion is to listen and learn, it is important that it be as free and honest as possible. I plan to write a column for the Sunday Opinion & Ideas section about the discussion. While the column will note who some of the participants were and report in general terms what was said, specific comments will not be attributed to individuals and nobody will be quoted by name. The discussion will not be recorded, although someone from the newspaper will take notes and later provide a summary to the participants. The summary also will not quote participants by name. *Herald-Leader* reporters, columnists and editorial writers will not use quotes or comments from the discussion in any future articles.]

Back to Rona: Some operating guidelines for tonight: You know, we are the Kentucky trial of something that is happening in all 50 states. So let's try to get all the good out of this that we can. The first thing is to do something useful, and the second is to do it in a way that builds and contributes. So of course we want to have a civil discourse, and that includes agreeing when it is merited, and disagreeing plainly, clearly, and yet civilly when disagreeing is in order. We intend to reason together here, and to do it in a way that develops new knowledge and suggests improvement, but without unnecessary baggage of harsh tone or personal attack.

While in the outer circle:

The task is to listen intently

To understand points of view and reasons behind points of view that you have not had a chance to consider before.

While in inner circle:

Speak when you have something to say -- clearly, directly, briefly

Listen for understanding

No requirement for consensus, though I may check for agreement from time to time

Tone: inquiring, aiming for improvement and usefulness, civil (though hard truths are welcomed)

Blue Sheets: An alternative or additional way to make points and share ideas. At any time, write anything you wish on the Blue Sheets you find on your chairs. These can be anonymous, or you may sign them if you wish. We will collect them after the session.

We will now draw lots for the order of groups. [Solicit helper from the group to draw out the slips of paper.]

6:00 Group 1 to the center

Quick round of introductions: name and position or role

What measuring stick do you use to determine whether the *Herald-Leader's* coverage of local schools is credible?

Probes, if needed:

→What makes you place particularly strong trust in a story, column, or photo?

→What do you see as dead giveaways that a story is not credible [believable, trustworthy]?

→Which role do you think is most important for the *Herald-Leader*: watchdog or cheerleader?

→What do you see as the *Herald-Leader's* agenda with regard to coverage of local schools? [If people mention biases, ask for evidence, examples.]

→How do the overall selection and placement of stories, columns, and photos on local school contribute to your credibility assessment?

[If there is available time] Ask people to quickly call out one thing the *Herald-Leader* could do to become a more credible source of news on local schools. [Move this quickly — no discussion.]

- 6:25 Break to retrieve boxed meals
- 6:40 Group 2 to the center (may want to wait to eat)
- 7:05 Group 3 to the center
- 7:30 Group 4 to the center
- 7:55 Whole group: Developing recommendations to *Herald-Leader*

You have heard several strong points of view about the credibility of the *Herald-Leader's* local schools coverage. What are the most important changes the *Herald-Leader* can make to improve the credibility of that coverage?

Probes, if needed:

→Restate as sentence completion task: The most important thing the *Herald-Leader* could do to become a more credible source of news on local schools is _____.

→What would you like to see more of, less of, the same of?

→What other sources of news about local schools do you consider credible?

→What one best piece of advice do you want to give to the decision makers at the *Herald-Leader*?

- 8:27 Blue Sheet reminder: May I remind you that you may put your unexpressed ideas or points on blue sheets? Also, you have an opportunity there to give the *Herald-Leader* feedback on this session and how it could strengthen its efforts to improve its credibility with readers in the future.

Many thanks for coming.

- 8:30 Adjourn

Lexington Herald-Leader Credibility Roundtable: Ideas and Responses

1. Please write any ideas or suggestions you have about how the *Herald-Leader* can improve the credibility of its coverage of local schools. Use the back of this page if you wish.

2. What's the best idea you heard tonight for improving the credibility of the *Herald-Leader's* coverage of local schools?

3. Please rate the effectiveness of this session on credibility:

| | | | | |
|----------------------|---|--------------|---|------------------|
| <i>Not Effective</i> | | <i>So-So</i> | | <i>Top Notch</i> |
| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |

Comments:

4. What should the *Herald-Leader* do in the future to continue getting readers' ideas for improving the credibility of its local school coverage and other issues?
