

“Circulation department personnel is in the key spot to make and hold friends for the newspaper. No other department has the opportunity to come face to face with so many customers and to make a good or bad impression for the newspaper.”

— W. C. TODD,
Circulation Manager,
Gary, Ind.,
Post-Tribune

CHAPTER 5

Responsibilities of Circulation Department Personnel

WELL COMPREHENDED by every successful publisher is the need for a circulation department hard-hitting in its efforts to sell subscriptions, courteous in its dealings with patrons and prospects, and alert to every opportunity for advancing the newspaper's influence. Circulation department personnel can make or break a newspaper.

Both weekly and daily papers must have careful circulation direction and promotion if they are to extend their influence in the community where they are published. To give little attention to circulation other than sending out expiration notices and receipts is to miss out on substantial income from both circulation and advertising, two sources of income susceptible to gratifying increase when carefully and consistently managed.

Everett Sudderth of the Johnson City, Tenn., *Press-Chronicle* (combined circulation 18,535, population 27,864) describes the circulation department as “the liaison between the newspaper and the subscriber. It is of great importance, particularly in a small town, to have circulation employees with a pleasing personality, as a day never passes but they are dealing with the public by telephone, over the counter, or at the front door.”

Personal conduct on or off the job, such as courtesy, cultivating the friendship of every acquaintance and constantly endeavoring to say and do the little things that might tend to please everyone, works wonders in building newspaper circulation.

Robert Taylor of the Flint, Mich., *Journal* (circulation 92,706, population 163,143) adds: "Circulation folks are not only responsible for the delivery of newspapers, but their obligation to the trust imposed upon them goes much further. They must be salesmen, and good salesmen, because in most cases the circulation personnel is the immediate connecting link between the publisher and the public."

Certain standards of conduct and important responsibilities rest alike on all members of the circulation staff, but each member has definite, rigid responsibilities as well. Although these responsibilities have been touched upon in the preceding chapter, they require fuller analysis and emphasis.

CIRCULATION HEAD IS IMPORTANT EXECUTIVE

That the person who directs circulation activities in a newspaper organization carries extremely heavy responsibilities is acknowledged by all who understand modern publishing problems. The paper must have circulation if it is worth anything to the advertiser. It must have advertising revenue and it must rely on revenue from circulation if it is to maintain its existence. Within the past decade subscription rates have been raised by most newspapers so that circulation income provides an important part of the newspaper's revenue.

"This magnifies the position of the circulation manager," says C. W. Bevinger, circulation manager of the Memphis, Tenn., *Commercial Appeal* and *Press-Scimitar* (combined circulation 350,536, population 396,000), "and it increases his responsibilities, demanding a more alert, better educated, higher type person who can competently administer the more businesslike developments that have come to this phase of newspapering."

The Circulation Manager's responsibilities draw upon his abilities from many angles. To a certain extent he serves in ten important roles, each of which requires almost expert performance:

1. *Top executive.*

In addition to planning and directing the operation of the entire circulation department, he must work directly with the general manager of the newspaper. On larger papers, the circulation manager usually has a number of special assistants, but he is responsible to the general manager for all that is done toward selling, delivering and collecting for the paper. On smaller papers, the circulation manager must do much of the work himself or at least actually and personally direct its progress.

2. *Sales manager.*

He must direct the sale of the finished product of the newspaper plant just as the sales manager of any factory must successfully direct

the sale of the units his plant produces. Success or failure of the sales department largely determines the success or failure of a newspaper just as in any industry. A newspaper must compete with magazines for the dollars spent for reading material and with television and radio for the hours formerly devoted to reading. In a community where there are two newspapers, they compete strongly with each other for reader attention. The circulation manager must be sales conscious and organize his sales force to canvass every area, and present every sound argument favoring the newspaper; for this, high class salesmanship is required.

3. Auditor.

He must have a thorough knowledge of auditing, for the receipts from circulation come in varied and unhandy denominations, and even the smallest accounts must be accurate. Critical and careful analysis is necessary to keep handling costs at a minimum. Inefficiency in this department soon devours the profits. "His budget is adhered to and he sponsors a businesslike policy," says Donald J. Wood. "He avoids wasteful turnover and high pressure business, and he encourages scientific verification of all new orders and stops. Too, the operating costs per subscriber are investigated, as well as the revenue of the circulation department in relation to those costs. Basic business principles dictate that the successful circulation manager keep his revenue in excess of his disbursements."¹

4. Traffic manager.

Transportation of papers to all sections of the circulation area is a prime responsibility of the circulation department. Where the bundles must be delivered, the time they must be received, by what means they may be transported with greatest economy and speed—all must be coordinated by the circulation manager. He must be familiar with bus and train schedules, airplane flights and all other possible means of transporting his newspaper; he must know the differences in rates of the various services available, the merits of each and their operational procedures. Many newspapers work out special contract hauls with private and public carriers to supplement and improve the service available by railways, busses and truck lines.

5. Lawyer.

He may not need to be a full-fledged lawyer, but he should understand laws concerning interstate commerce, postal laws, laws pertaining to child labor and the rights and demands of labor unions.

¹Donald J. Wood, *Newspaper Circulation Management—A Profession*, Newspaper Research Bureau, Oakland, Calif., p. 16.

He must have a sound knowledge of contracts and know how to write them so as to define clearly the status of newspaperboys and distributors.

6. *Public relations man.*

This qualification is stressed by M. E. Fisher, circulation director of the Minneapolis *Star and Tribune* (combined circulation 497,784, population 521,718). "We are living in an age of tension," he says, "not only on an international basis but down through many levels to the family unit. Everyone is striving to better himself in one way or another and, in doing so, there is a tendency to 'speak up' even to the point of becoming angry and ignoring such things as friendship, courtesy, manners and poise. A newspaper circulation operation reaches into many, many homes, where the newspaper's influence is greatly felt. The circulation manager and his assistants must be well versed in human relations if they are to be successful under conditions which exist today." A good circulation manager must excel in good public relations for he must build and maintain good will in the minds of the public toward his newspaper and his organization.

7. *Promotion expert.*

"For success in circulation," says James F. Jae, former circulation manager of the St. Louis, Mo., *Globe-Democrat* (circulation 310,243, population 856,796) "promotion really is the keystone." The progressive circulation manager will see that his department produces advertisements of all kinds for all kinds of media, direct mail pieces, brochures and other printed features. He will especially extoll the training and other benefits accruing to newspaperboys in an effort to obtain greater public appreciation of their service.

8. *Social service worker and youth supervisor.*

No circulation manager will dispute his role in that field. He deals with youth at a critical and testing age. He must understand boys and place over them men who know how to interest and influence them. He himself must merit their confidence and win approval of their parents. He must provide for his newspaperboys wholesome recreation and entertainment as well as business training and profitable work.

9. *Personnel manager.*

Working under him are persons of various abilities in many different jobs. The fitting of each to a position for which he is best suited helps to spell success for the department. "It is up to the circulation director to see that each employee in his department feels that he is an important cog or integral part of the department," said

G. Gordon Strong, general manager of the Brush-Moore Newspapers, Inc., in a talk before the Ohio Circulation Managers Association. "Men do not work for money alone and hence each member of the circulation department can be made to feel well rewarded if he is kept advised as to what the department is trying to accomplish and how the part he is playing will help toward the common goal."

10. *All-round newspaperman.*

It is greatly to the circulation manager's advantage if he has had the training, knowledge and experience of a newspaperman, so he may easily comprehend the important relation of his department to all other departments of the newspaper. Lacking that background, he will need an intuitive understanding of the relationship. Frank Thayer emphasizes this point in his book *Newspaper Business Management*.² In an address before the International Circulation Managers Association, he said: "A circulation executive should have an effective appreciation of the editorial phase of the business end and, it would seem, he should be definitely a member of the executive board relative to operations and policies, especially on metropolitan newspapers. The circulation manager is perhaps closer to the public than either the editorial or advertising department." And Donald J. Wood adds: "The efficient circulation manager appreciates that a newspaper is a business enterprise and conducts his department toward the end of increasing the revenue of the newspaper. Above all, he is understanding and sympathetic with other department heads, and makes every effort to have them realize the importance of his department's functions and problems as he seeks to understand their problems and functions."³

Manager May Need Assistants

If the newspaper has a large carrier force and is required to conduct an extensive promotion and sales program, the circulation manager or director usually is provided an assistant manager and perhaps several division and district managers to aid in directing the activities of the department.

ASSISTANT MANAGER

The Assistant Manager may be a "strong right arm" to the manager, assuming many heavy responsibilities that otherwise would fall upon the manager. He usually does much of the counseling with district managers and carriers and maintains a close relationship with all employees, filling in for them when they are on vacation or off

² Frank Thayer, *Newspaper Business Management*, Prentice-Hall, Inc., Englewood Cliffs, N. J., p. 63.

³ Donald J. Wood, *Newspaper Circulation Management — A Profession*, Newspaper Research Bureau, Oakland, Calif., p. 9.

duty for any reason. This schools him in the fundamentals of circulation management and if he is quick to respond to responsibility, he usually is next in line for the top position when a vacancy occurs.

DIVISION SUPERINTENDENT OR MANAGER

Where the circulation is large, Division Superintendents or Managers are required to supervise operations within assigned areas. They emphasize sales and develop competition between carrier groups, offering a multitude of incentives, including merchandise awards, trips and cash for new orders (see Chaps. 7 and 8). They also create promotion material to support campaigns in their respective divisions (see Chap. 15).

DISTRICT MANAGER

To provide more intensive direction, a division may have several districts with a manager over each district. The District Manager's duties include such details as: (1) checking service complaints, (2) making occasional collections of delinquent accounts, (3) keeping records of carriers' progress, (4) selecting new carriers for routes, (5) contacting parents, (6) training carriers to call on new prospects, (7) reselling "stop orders," (8) working with sales crews, and (9) promoting new features through carriers.

Due to required intimate dealings with boys and parents in looking to the development of businesslike methods and manners, division and district managers must be selected with care. For one who serves in either of these capacities, W. E. Messick, circulation manager of the Lynchburg, Va., *News and Advance* (combined circulation 32,168, population 47,727) has set up the following list of qualities he must have:

1. *Knowledge of how to live.* He must live successfully, cleanly and happily in order to lead successfully.
2. *Proper attitude.* He must be vitally interested in the complete welfare of his followers.
3. *Sincerity of purpose.* He must have a purpose and a sincere determination to carry out that purpose.
4. *Confidence.* A man who lacks self-confidence is afraid to act, and a man who does not act, does not produce.
5. *Courage.* Instilling confidence in carriers is not so difficult if the carriers know their leader has the courage of his convictions.
6. *Integrity.* This vital factor in leadership cannot be simulated. Unless a man has it, his ability to lead is lost.
7. *Enthusiasm.* One must be enthusiastic in order to show it and so to inspire it.
8. *Personal appearance.* A good district manager must be neat and clean at all times.

Other Circulation Executives

In the circulation departments of metropolitan newspapers are other executives with heavy responsibilities:

SUNDAY CIRCULATION MANAGER

A Sunday Circulation Manager directs the promotion, sale and delivery of Sunday papers through agencies, newsstands, street salesmen, route men and sales racks. He dispatches pre-date copies to their various sales points on time and in sufficient quantities to meet Sunday demands. Motor route carrier-salesmen who deliver only Sunday papers come directly under his supervision.

CIRCULATION PROMOTION MANAGER

A Circulation Promotion Manager keeps the public sold on the newspaper, strengthens the morale of the carrier force, and assists the newspaper in keeping a close relationship with the community. He prepares publicity material concerning the various features carried in the paper and uses all kinds of media to explain their merits. Working closely with the circulation manager and division managers, he plans and conducts campaigns for both carrier and mail subscriptions and promotes contests for the carrier organization.

TRAINING SUPERVISOR

A Training Supervisor conducts training programs for district and branch managers, independent distributors, street salesmen, solicitors and carriers. He contributes greatly toward efficiency in all sections of the circulation department.

STATE, CITY, SUBURBAN SUPERVISORS

These Supervisors or Advisors work primarily with district managers and distributors in improving service and in building sales. Regardless of whether they work in the city, suburbs, or out in the state, their responsibilities are essentially the same, consisting mainly of working with carriers and cooperating with school principals, Parent-Teacher organizations, ministers, Boy Scout officials and others interested in boy development programs. They are public relations men for the circulation department.

Many Engaged in Selling

In the development of circulation, strong emphasis always is placed on selling.

SPECIAL CAMPAIGNS MANAGER

Many of the larger newspapers employ a Special Campaigns Manager, who plans and directs subscription selling campaigns, mainly through the carrier organization or in connection with the

development of a new circulation area. This requires a man with organizing ability and sales push.

SALES DEVELOPMENT SUPERVISOR

Cooperating with the special campaigns manager may be a Sales Development Supervisor, who continually studies the field to discover opportunities for circulation expansion.

SOLICITORS

Special Solicitors, who call upon homes in the urban and rural areas or make contacts by phone, may be full-time or part-time employees. Many newspapers have on their permanent payroll men who sell subscriptions to and make collections from farmers and other rural residents. Others employ women during certain periods of the year to solicit by telephone or mail. These persons, skilled in the art of salesmanship, usually work on a commission basis, but sometimes are paid a small salary plus commission.

CARRIER-SALESMEN

Other important members of the sales force are Carriers, whose duties are discussed in Chapters 7, 9, 11 and 12. "Carrier-salesman" is the term generally used in describing a carrier because of the great part he performs in selling. On most newspapers he is a young businessman in his own right, buying papers at wholesale and selling them at retail. The circulation manager or district manager gives every assistance possible in the way of counsel and encouragement, but the boy is strictly on his own.

Prompt Delivery Requires Organization

Getting the papers to readers as quickly as possible after they come from the press requires special attention and organization. Metropolitan newspapers maintain large fleets of trucks to take bundles to various points throughout the circulation area. Transportation or traffic problems require capable direction.

TRAFFIC MANAGER OR DISPATCHER

A department for trucks and routes is headed by a Traffic Manager or Dispatcher, who sees that adequate facilities are available for deliveries and that the system operates promptly and smoothly.

Working under the traffic manager may be several assistants, assigned to direct activities in definite areas. Hundreds of truck drivers may be employed or may operate their own trucks under contract.

On small dailies and weeklies men or boys usually are employed as carriers or operate their own delivery businesses as Independent Contractors.

MAILERS

Sorting, bundling and labeling papers to be delivered through the postoffice comprise another responsibility of the circulation department. Some papers must be addressed and wrapped singly. This is all done by Mailers, who must work rapidly in order that there may be no delay in reaching subscribers on local rural routes and in distant areas.

Capable Office Force Is Required

An important detail in connection with circulation management is accuracy in bookkeeping and courtesy in dealing with the public through correspondence and at the counter.

OFFICE MANAGER

In the circulation department of a large newspaper, an Office Manager directs the office personnel in the keeping of all records, making out reports for the circulation manager and general manager, and handling all correspondence. Requiring special care is the compiling of facts and figures for the Audit Bureau of Circulations. The issuing of "starts" and "stops" to carriers and the handling of moneys turned in by carriers are also under the jurisdiction of the office manager.

Other members of the office force of a large newspaper are Mail Subscription Clerks, who continuously check the mailing lists for papers going to persons on rural routes or in distant cities; City Paid-In-Advance Clerks, who keep tab on subscriptions paid well in advance; and Detail and Phone Clerks, who handle small but important details demanding attention mostly by telephone.

IMPORTANCE OF PERSONNEL SELECTION

Due to the vital part that circulation plays in a newspaper's success and the heavy responsibilities resting on the circulation department, great care should be used in selecting circulation personnel.

A lack of attention to this important detail by a number of newspapers was revealed in a survey made by Arthur Diaz, when he was a graduate student at Pennsylvania State College. In contacts with 100 newspapers of 85,000 circulation or more, he learned that less than one-third of them use any kind of tests for applications for supervisory positions. A half-hour interview by the circulation manager usually decided whether the applicant would or would not be hired, even when he had never worked for the firm previously.

Diaz strongly appeals for better procedures in selection, a more varied source of personnel, and better training for staff members. Inward and outward conditions are pressing newspapers toward these goals.