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I'm going to talk about the need for a new generation of diversity efforts, about the role senior editors play in that process and about how one newspaper -- the Mercury News -- tries to fulfill its commitment to diversity.

But, in all honesty, I have to tell you that I'm feeling a little cranky today. I'm cranky that half of the editors at ASNE walk out of the room when the diversity sessions start. I'm cranky that about 50 percent of America's newsrooms have no journalists of color. I'm cranky about abysmal retention rates and editors who make excuses instead of hires. I'm cranky about the fact that the same dedicated, committed cadre of industry leaders continues to make progress reflecting their diverse communities, while too many of my colleagues pay lip service -- or less -- to an issue that goes to our very credibility.

Pardon me, but I'm fed up with incremental progress. I want to see the status quo in my rear-view mirror. That's why I challenged my newsroom to take some bold new steps -- and I'll tell you about them in a bit.

But, since I'm cranky, I feel compelled to do a little truth-telling first. The Boston Globe took a fresh look at ASNE's diversity in its April 11 edition, in a fascinating story by Tim Dedman. The Globe compared the numbers reported by the nation's 1,448 daily newspapers with the diversity in their communities to arrive at a "Party Score."

Dedman wrote, "The hidden variable may be motivation to change.

He quoted Tim McGuire, then ASNE's president, whose Minneapolis Star-Tribune is at 89 percent of parity: "I think that increasingly diversity is within the control of the editor. We did it by sheer will."

My time in the trenches leads me to agree with Tim: Changing content and changing the composition of our newsroom is more dependent on leadership and managerial will than any other single factor. And most editors duck the challenge.

It takes courage to convert the values of diversity into action that changes coverage. It takes intellectual engagement with skeptical staff members to elevate the coverage of diversity and to champion its complicated nuances. It takes self-confidence to volunteer for a difficult, daunting, daily running battle with traditional news

judgment. It takes perseverance because change begins at the top -- and it ends the day you stop pressing for it.

When you look at the newspapers that have started to address their changing communities, the common denominator is managerial will. Because without it, the good intentions of staff members won't be sufficient. How many times have journalists lamented, "I'm glad we're talking about this at NAHJ or NABJ or AAJA or NLGJA, but I wish my editor was in the room."

I've often been asked why a white male editor would care about this topic so passionately. Because we can't pretend to be advocates for social justice and equity unless we're giving everyone, everyone, access to the pages of our newspapers.

Through my work with APME and ASNE I've come to understand the linkage between our credibility and our ability to reflect a diversity community. For years, though, I struggled for a journalistic justification for changing our coverage because newsrooms weren't buying the argument that diversity makes good business sense. Worse, they resisted the diversity proposition that rested on ethical or moral grounds because it came wrapped in corporate scorecards.

But I've found that there is a valid journalistic argument that even the holiest of the high priests of journalism in our newsroom can accept. It is this: In order for our newspapers to be fundamentally accurate, we have to reflect the whole community. When journalists can agree that diversity is a core component of accuracy, it becomes a value and values driven journalists can be motivated to change.

So, I stand with you, an unabashed zealot for newspaper that see the new America -- and as a resource I hope you'll tap in the future.

Let me talk a little bit about the paper I know best.

On January 2, 2002, the front page of the Mercury News featured Julie Vu and Joseph Castro, the first babies of born in Santa Clara County in 2002. They were born one second apart to working mothers.

These babies are the vanguard of the new Silicon Valley: fresh, out-of-the-oven symbols of the changing demographics we see around us. That story, along with the impact of technology created in the Valley, have helped us focus on two stories that define what I think is the most dynamic region in the country.

We're honored that three national reports have cited the Mercury News as one of the nation's best-practice newspapers on the issue of diversity in hiring, in our values and in our coverage. I believe that any success we've achieved stems from an inclusive definition of diversity that encompasses gender (an area where we're going to work harder), socioeconomic status, age, ethnicity, sexual orientation, political bent, religion and physical ability.

Every day, we make this pledge on page 2A: “We will reflect the changing demographics of the community in both coverage and hiring, recognizing that diversity is a core component of accuracy.”

But despite our best efforts, the difference between the so-called best-practice newspapers and the rest of the industry is the degree to which we’re all falling short of the goal.

I want to tell you today how we’re going to try to close that gap and why.

In a nutshell, my thinking begins with our remarkable market: If we can’t envision bold innovation in Silicon Valley, where diversity and technology intersect at ambition, then where? If one of America’s most diverse newsroom staffs can’t take a giant step, then who will do it? If not now, while new social identities and alliances are being forged, then when?

I was reminded recently about the heritage of diversity in news coverage. A small group of editors were having lunch with Howell Raines, executive editor of the New York Times, and the conversation turned to diversity in staffing and in coverage. He reminded us that he was from Alabama and he talked about the kind of home-grown “populist journalism” that a handful of editors and publishers practiced in the South, often defying their own communities to champion the cause of civil rights. Raines reminded us that covering diverse communities is about “doing journalism for and about real people.”

That proud chapter in journalism’s history reminds us that we are committed to seeing allof real people because it’s morally right, because it’s about improving our journalism and because it’s vital for the future of our business and our communities.

In Silicon Valley, some of those real people are H1-B visa holders from Taiwan whose effort to create a new semiconductor design was chronicled in a seven-part series, “Birth of a Chip.” Virtually every employee quoted and photographed was Asian. It was the best kind of diversity in news coverage because it simply reflected the actual workforce of the company and it wasn’t forced or artificial.

I’m constantly amazed at how simple, yet how complicated it is to make sure that our mainstream coverage fully reflects our community. Here’s an example: When we write a story about asking the boss for a raise, we should do it with sophisticated layers of understanding of the underlying cultural archetypes that make that conversation a very different experience for Asians, Latinos, African-Americans and whites.

One of journalism’s dearest principles is giving voice to the voiceless. We will do that more effectively when we begin to hear the sounds of silence and understand their meaning -- and then to report on what it really feels like, smells like, sounds,

like to live in Silicon Valley as a Mexican immigrant or a Vietnamese shop owner, as well as a yuppie techie.

How challenging will this be? I find this to be a mind-blowing example: In December, Art Director Pankaj Paul was telling a group of us about a discussion at his Hindu temple about “The Nutcracker” and he was citing this cover story in Arts and Entertainment.

Pankaj said, “Nutcracker? They didn’t have a clue. If you were writing for that audience, you might as well have done a story about the meaning of Christmas.” I was stunned. How different is that view of the world? Now actually, I wouldn’t have done the story about the history of Christmas, but I would have advocate running a sidebar or a box on “The Nutcracker” through the years and its relationship to the Christmas story.

How do we plan to go about this?

- Our Race & Demographics team of four reporters and one editor has been replicated in many newsrooms-in no small part thanks to the recognition Columbia gave it years ago. Well, in April of last year, we decided it was time to take the next step. We reallocated positions from elsewhere to allow the team to grow from five to seven. And the team has expanded its mission with a new reporter assigned to cover women’s issues.
- More importantly, we made Race & Demographics a full-fledged department unto itself. And the department has no fewer that 20 “satellite” reporters and editors from every department and bureau across the newsroom—including Viet Mercury and Nuevo Mundo, our in-language weeklies. While every reporter, photographer, artist and designer is expected to reflect the community’s diversity, one team has to take the lead -- and that is what this team has done since its inception. They have been in the paper -- across every section and with regularity -- with stories about the intersections of cultures and genders. And they’ll produce two to three major projects each year.

Here are some examples form 2002: Our Food editor explained how more Latinos, Asians, African-Americans and Indo-Americans are raising their profiles in the world of wine service. “It’s a remarkable turn,” she wrote, “given that many come from cultures in which wine drinking is not only uncommon, but in a few cases, forbidden because of religious beliefs.” The more of these practical applications of cultural understanding we bring to our pages, the more effective we are at revealing the complexities of a multicultural world.

We also looked at how one Fremont school's changing demographics shifted the priorities of its students. In the 1990s, Mission San Jose High School's student body went from mostly white to predominantly Asian. It's now in California's Top 10 academically, but the former football powerhouse can no longer field a varsity team. More students tried out for badminton than for junior varsity and freshman football. The school symbolizes how America might be changing.

In the fall of 2002, we took a look at the informal economy that keeps one Latino neighborhood going. We used the "vigorous microeconomy" of Mayfair to frame a rich read about the people who live there. It was an important story because it showed how immigrants who take the valley's lowest-paying jobs manage to get by--principally by helping each other and taking on extra work.

- Just last month, we finished the third and fourth rounds a groundbreaking program that our parent company, Knight Ridder, sponsored that is designed to help journalists better understand culturally based differences. The goals are twofold: to make our reporting smarter -- and to make our newsroom a challenging and comfortable environment for everyone. With a newsroom that is 33 percent people of color and 17 percent Asian-American, that's essential. More than 100 Mercury News journalist have now gone through this program.
- Perhaps, most importantly, we're broadening our source lists. We gave every reporter a full week to call the organizations or sources they cover to ask for their help in finding more expert women and people of color. The results were wonderful:

Workplace reporter Margaret Steen told me, "I set up 14 appointments the week before and came away with about 30 new people or groups to use as sources, plus numerous job-seekers who were willing to talk to me. I've already used some these sources in my reporting this week."

Education reporter Dana Hull said, "A phone call to an African-American parent in Fremont led to a conversation about discipline in the public schools -- and the names and numbers of other black parents in the district who worry that their children are being suspended for being black."

Here's pop music writer's Brad Kava's assessment: "Besides the professional rewards these have been some of the best days of my life. I've made new friends; I practice Spanish regularly and am returning to study in Mexico next year. By learning more about where almost half of the people in San Jose come from, my life and my view of my

community is so much more *rico*. Brad's life is *rico*, indeed. His venture into Rock en Espanol led him to Mexico's legendary rockers, El Tri. Band leader Alex Lora told him to let him know when Brad would be studying Spanish in Mexico. Well, they hooked up, Brad jammed with the band and even spent time touring with El Tri in Mexico and the United States.

Now, imagine 120 reporters immersing themselves in these beats to this extent. Could that possibly translate into 500 new sources of color? How about 1,000? 2,000? Would that constitute a bold step in your view? The cost is the equivalent of two full-time reporters for a full year. But few investments offer a better payback.

Those are just some of the steps we're taking to change our newspaper. And we do need to change our newspaper. Citizenship among foreign-born residents soared in the Bay Area in the 1990s. In Santa Clara County, 34 percent of its residents are foreign-born. The county is 43 percent white, 26 percent Asian, 24 percent Hispanic, 4 percent others, and 3 percent black. One in six babies born in Silicon Valley last year was of mixed race. Anyone know the most common name given to boy babies last year in California? Juan.

I know we can change—and I'll be a little provocative here: It is my experience that most women journalists try hard to get women's voices into their stories and that most people of color do the same for ethnic voices. That's one reason why I believe that this isn't a matter of practicality. It's a matter of will and purpose.

And, as leaders and managers, we're not going to dodge those who say our efforts are all about political correctness. We're going to take them head-on because their views are legitimate, too, if our underlying principle is inclusiveness.

We will be guided by the words of the late publisher of the Oakland Tribune, Bob Maynard. In 1979, he wrote that a newspaper should be "an instrument of community understanding."

I've asked our reporters to consider this proposition: Reflecting diversity is as much about what we bring to the community as what we find.

Are we bringing an unmistakable passion for the richness of life around us? Do we crave the authenticity that seeing the whole community brings to our news reports? Do we understand that diversity can make us more confident in the quality of our journalism?

Do we try to focus on civic solutions or slink down from the hills to shoot the wounded? Readers want a lot of what we already offer: hard news,

investigations, information about schools and health. But they want news to be told through people they can relate to. They want a reason to hope. They want to see their successes reflected in our work as well as their tribulations.

There is no surer way to engage readers--and to help them understand their stake in civic life—than to help them see others like themselves in our pages. After 25 years in journalism, I believe this as deeply as anything I know: To the extent that people see their communities represented in our pages, they view us as credible.

We're going to find a way for all of the voices in our community to be heard and respected in a civil conversation that may well get uncomfortable at times because race is still America's most difficult topic and it hasn't gotten any easier in the wake of September 11.

I know we're on the right path. I received a letter from a reader who told me that she started receiving the Mercury News during the week of September 11. In addition to our coverage of the attacks, she was moved by our coverage of diverse communities. She actually took the time to write to me: "As a half white/half Mexican-American teacher living in Sunnyvale and teaching for the Redwood City School District, I often have felt the media (be it print or television—news and entertainment) ignores my reality. Whether it was growing up in Los Angeles or living here in the Bay Area, it's hard to find true diversity (especially not just black and white) fully represented. Your coverage has been exceptional... I feel like I'm actually seeing my reality and my perspective of the world in the Mercury. As a single, Latino mother from Sunnyvale, I can see myself in your newspaper. And that hasn't always been the case with newspapers."

That's high and humbling praise from a reader. And it'll take that kind of commitment to ensure that Jan. 2, 2002, won't be the last time that Julie Vu and Joseph Castro see themselves in the Mercury News. In fact, it wasn't. On January 2, 2003, we revisited those kids- and the first baby born this year- to immigrant parents from Ghana. But we couldn't locate Julie Vu when we began doing the legwork for this year's story. So we turned to Viet Mercury, which published a "fetcher," asking the community for help finding Julie's family. Several readers responded- enabling us to do the story. How's that for leveraging your newspaper's position in a multicultural society?

Thank you for your time.

