

Learn to love change

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I spend my time defending journalism and urging journalists to change. So I was delighted to see this passionate [piece](#) by American journalism analyst and consultant Amy Gahran, exhorting her fellow hacks to lighten up and go with the flow.

I am not a New Media evangelical and I am impressed by the way that the UK media has adapted to online journalism. But I agree that there are still a lot of sticks in the muds. I can't believe, for example, that on Friday I am talking at an [event](#) where the title is 'Is New Media Killing Journalism?' That is sooo not the question. All media is now digital to some extent. The real question is how to sustain journalism – full stop. Or 'period' as Amy might say. Here's her post in full in case you are too lazy to click on the [link](#):

I've been getting quite aggravated at the close-minded and helpless attitudes I'm still encountering from too many journalists about how the media landscape is changing. Those attitudes are revealed by statements, decisions, actions, and inaction which indicate underlying assumptions such as:

- *The only journalism that counts is that done by mainstream news orgs, especially in print or broadcast form. Alternative, independent, online, collaborative, community, and other approaches to news are assumed to be inferior or even dangerous.*
- *Priesthood syndrome: Traditional journalists are the sole source of news that can and should be trusted — which gives them a privileged and sacred role that society is ethically obligated to support.*
- *Journalists and journalism cannot survive without traditional news orgs, which offer the only reliable, ethical, and credible support for a journalistic career.*
- *Real journalists only do journalism. They don't dirty their hands or distract themselves with business and business models, learning new tools, building community, finding new approaches to defining and covering news, etc. As the Louisville Courier-Journal staffer [Mark Schaver](#) said just this morning on Twitter, "[Now] is not a good time [for journalists] if you don't want your journalism values infected with marketing values."*
- *Journalistic status and authority demands aloofness. This leads to myriad problems such as believing you're smarter than most people in your community; refusing to "compromise" yourself professionally by engaging in frank public conversation with your community; and using objectivity as an excuse to be uncaring, cynical, or disdainful.*
- *Good journalism doesn't change much. So if it is changing significantly, it must be dying. Which in turn means the world is in big trouble, and probably deserves what it will get.*

There's a common problem with all these assumptions: They directly cut off options from consideration. This severely limits the ability of journalists and journalism to adapt and thrive.

I realize that right now is a scary time for journalists who crave stability. I have immense sympathy for good, smart people (many of whom have families to support and retirements to plan) who fear the unknown. Many of the news orgs that have sheltered and supported these journalists as they ply their craft are crumbling due to their inability or unwillingness to adapt their business models — leading to layoffs, buyouts, attrition, dwindling resources, overwork, and general demoralization.

I also know — first hand — that the prospect of learning new skills can be daunting. (That's why, after

all these years, I still don't speak any language but English, and I still don't know how to write computer code.) Plus, many of us have spent lots of money on j-school and many years in professional journalism honing our writing and reporting skills. We don't want to learn how to think like an entrepreneur, or an information architect, or a community manager. We just want to keep doing what we know how to do; we didn't sign up for all this extra stuff.

And I also understand journalists' pride in the unique nature and value of our work. I wouldn't want to live in a world that didn't include solid reporting done by skilled journalists. That's why I'm so passionate and persistent about helping to move journalism forward.

However... Even though despair is a natural result of prolonged fear and difficulty — when too many people in any culture are in despair, that culture can easily become toxic (overwhelmingly negative to the point of becoming self-destructive or self-defeating).

It's worth looking over the Adbusters special series, [Toxic Culture USA](#), by Kalle Lasn and Richard Degrandpre. Pay special attention to the [research bibliography](#), citing several studies relating to the prevalence of despair and depression in certain communities and how that has a strong negative, destructive effect on those communities.

If this was nearly any other industry undergoing a sea change, I think my compassion and patience for the impact of workers' despair would last longer. But regarding journalists, my personal patience is starting to wear thin.

The way I see it (and I'm far from alone in this view), right now is a time of immense opportunity for journalism and journalists to take on a broader and even more vital role in society. It's a chance for journalists to not only continue doing good work, but maybe also to have more impact than ever before. If they can make this progress within updated, adapted news organizations, fine. But if not, they can find ways to do it independently, collaboratively, or by founding new supporting institutions or businesses.

Plus, new approaches to journalism can simply be more fun. As a group, journalists don't seem to have nearly enough fun. In particular, engaging directly with your community can be fun and rewarding. Learning to monitor and improve the spread and impact of your work can be fun. And the process of learning anything new at all also can be a lot of fun. In fact, that basic craving for continual learning is what drew many of us to journalism in the first place. Remember that?

Yes, we need to solve the immediate problem of updating our business models, tool set, and skill set. This doesn't have to be arduous — it can be playful. I'm looking forward to the [NewsTools](#) conference later this week to help address some of these issues in a constructive and (dare I say it) fun way.

Here's the heart of the matter: Journalists (more so than most other professions) are supposed to be fundamentally curious and profoundly interested in what's happening around them. Right now is no time for despair. It's time to stop discouraging each other and start applying our innately enterprising abilities to our own field.

And let's have more fun while doing it.