

TRAGEDY AND BAD NEWS: WHY IT'S IMPORTANT WE'RE THERE

READERS HAVE CERTAINLY LET US KNOW WHAT THEY THINK, WRITES ROSELLA



LOUIE ROSELLA
Columnist

It's about trust. Our relationship with our readers is built on transparency, honesty and integrity.

As such, we have launched a trust initiative to tell you who we are and how and why we do what we do. This column is part of that project.

The newsworthiness of a story is typically determined by several factors: is it significant? Does it impact people? Is it new?

Sadly, a basic truism in journalism is that, if a story involves an untimely death, a sudden tragedy or serious injury of some

kind, it ticks off all the boxes of what makes a news story.

Another sad truth is that stories like this are likely to get higher page views, web traffic and reader engagement.

The infamous term heard in the newsroom for as long as I can remember is "if it bleeds, it leads."

Unfortunately, for our customers, heartbreaking stories often come across like a train wreck in that viewers don't want to read or watch them, but at the same time, they just can't look away.

And, readers have let us know, without mincing words, what they think of our coverage of various, high-profile tragedies over the years.

"Your publication disgusts me. Why would you ruin the lives of two families?" read one of many emails I received during my ongoing coverage of a paramedic accused of impaired driving in a deadly Oakville crash.

She was referring to the fact that we ran a photo and identified during the charged paramedic, as well as the young man killed in the crash. "Totally insensitive."

There is so much more reason and purpose behind why we cover tragedies and "bad news stories." Believe me, it's not about public shaming or exploiting a sad situation.

Any time we, as journalists, can put a face, or faces, to a tragedy and reveal what transpired, it paints a more complete picture for our customers.

It brings greater atten-

tion and public awareness to an awful situation in the hopes of enhancing the social conversation about what's happening in our communities and effecting change in said communities.

Take the heartbreaking case of a Milton family who lost their 17-year-old son to a fentanyl overdose.

No one can argue that the case was magnified by us reporting on the heart-wrenching agony that Graham and Lori Norwood had to endure after losing their son Jaxen.

In this case, it was the parents who contacted Inside Halton and wanted to share the story of their son's fatal overdose in the hopes it could prevent other deaths.

The family, the victim, were front and centre.

Without the sad details, without the raw human emotion, the impact just isn't the same.

It is hoped that this story entices parents to talk to their children more about the dangers of drug use, just like the deadly case of suspected impaired driving compels

readers to think twice before they drink and drive.

This is content that effects change, where change is needed, in large part due to the media spotlight.

Louie Rosella is online editor for the Burlington Post, Oakville Beaver, Milton Canadian Champion and Georgetown/Acton Independent and Free Press.

We welcome your questions and value your comments. Email our trust committee at trust@metroland.com.

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