



## MAKING NEWSROOMS MORE DIVERSE AND INCLUSIVE

Journalism must reflect its readers—the people in its community. News organizations need to ensure the stories they tell are in line with the values and experiences of all their readers.

Unfortunately, people of colour and marginalized people tend to be poorly represented, not only in news stories but in newsrooms as well.

Irene Gentle is trying to change that at Torstar, one of the largest news organizations in Canada. For close to three years, Gentle was the editor of the Toronto Star. She oversaw the newsroom and helped decide what stories would be covered, and how.

In April 2021, she took on a new job at Torstar: Vice-President of Inclusion and Strategic Partnerships. Her goal is to ensure that marginalized and racialized people are well represented at the Star and the other newspapers and websites it owns. More than that, she wants to help build a culture in which,

once they're hired, they have a voice—a say in the way things are done and how the news is covered.

"(Do) we reflect accurately the communities we serve? Do we right now? No, we don't right now—almost no one does. That's the first step," says Gentle.



**Irene Gentle**  
Vice-President of Inclusion and Strategic Partnerships

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of community leaders and organizers from a geographic community where Torstar has a newsroom.

The panels, "come together once or more a year to talk about issues that matter to them... so we get a global sense of a local issue," she says.

Topics range from local success stories to local politics, opioid addiction, food banks,

To do that, the Star is having conversations, listening to people, creating guidelines, and providing training, she said.

The Star put together about 15 "community advisory panels," each of which is made up



### WHAT NEEDS TO BE DONE?

- ✓ More reporters of colour and people representing diverse backgrounds and abilities need to be hired in news organizations, including for leadership positions.
- ✓ All reporters need to be more aware of their own biases.
- ✓ The words used in news stories need to be inclusive and representative.
- ✓ All journalists need to be trained about how their own biases can affect their reporting and how they can break out of their "information bubbles" to seek different points of view.

affordability, health care, community violence and local democracy. The panels help Torstar's journalists be aware of what kinds of stories are important to the communities, "so we can better reflect it and tailor some of what we do to better address some of those things."

Gentle also co-ordinates workplace "employee resource groups," that work on many inclusion related initiatives. An editorial employee resource group has been instrumental in creating tipsheets, quizzes and guidelines to help Star journalism be as inclusive and relevant as possible.

Gentle wants to help Torstar newsrooms become representative in terms of the people they hire, such as reporters and editors.

"Over time, newsrooms across Canada have become more white, more affluent, more middle class, more educated than the communities overall that they serve... They're getting better but it's a slow process."

When the people who work in a newsroom are mostly white and middle-class, there can be "gaps" in their reporting that can lead to omissions and speaks to relevance in people's lives. "If they don't feel we're writing to and for them, why would they care about us?" she asks.

Gentle says that part of her job is to try to remove barriers for under-represented people to get hired at the organization and to get promoted into higher positions.

Before the Star began to focus on changing to better reflect their communities, they did internal research to find out who was currently working there and who felt left out. They wanted to make sure they would be able to measure their progress later.

Since Gentle and her team started the programs more than a year and a half ago, "we are seeing our newsrooms are becoming more representative at each level across Metroland and the Toronto Star."

The Star isn't the only news organization doing this kind of work. There are similar initiatives at other large news organizations such as the Globe and Mail and the CBC, says Gentle.

## WHERE DO JOURNALISTS GET THEIR FACTS?

Journalism always needs to be accurate. Journalists use "evidence-based facts" to tell news stories. Reporters find those facts through research and by talking to experts.

But who they talk to, and what they use for research, often depends on who the journalist is. For instance, a white, male journalist who only speaks English may have sources (people they interview for articles) who are also white, male and English-speaking. They may also use research based on their own point-of-view.

Does that mean there are no facts relevant to the story that could come from people in non-white communities and people who don't speak English? Of course not. But it does mean that those sources probably won't make it into that reporter's article. Readers will not get the benefit of those points of view—it will be as if they didn't exist.

