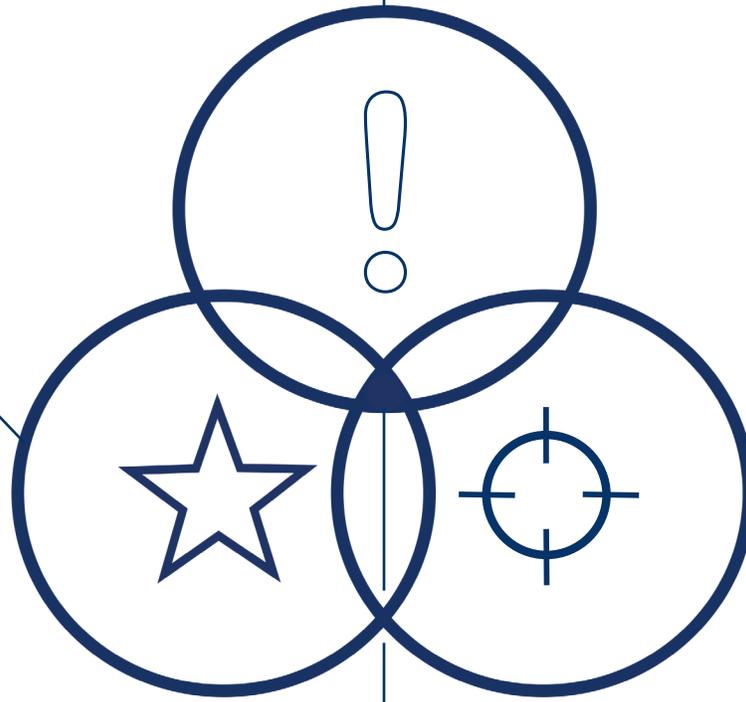


Reporters are in the business of telling stories that people want to read or watch. As a result, much of the news is unimportant (like celebrity scandals or political horse races) or inaccurate (like simplified technical concepts or incomplete, one-sided stories).

Reporters focus on what is **interesting**: People, events, and narratives that attract and hold the attention of their readers and viewers.

Leaders focus on what is **important**: Issues of high magnitude.

Leaders also focus on what is **accurate**: Both correct and complete.



The discipline for any leader facing a reporter is to identify the specific topics and language that are all three – **interesting, important and accurate** – and to avoid discussing that which is interesting but unimportant or inaccurate.

What reporters find interesting:

THE 5Cs OF NEWS

- 
Conflict
 A dispute or struggle between two or more sides – the central element of storytelling, since before David versus Goliath.
- 
Contradiction
 Juxtaposition of unlike elements, such as: “Man bites dog;” “You might think ... but actually ...;” “The rise and fall of ...”
- 
Controversy
 A connection with a topic already in the news.
- 
Colorful Language
 Language that is short, pithy, and vivid.
- 
Cast of Characters
 Individuals in often-exaggerated roles: The hero; the villain; the expert; the everyman.



President Barack Obama took office in 2009 with two top priorities: Economic stabilization and healthcare reform. With the passage of the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act a month into his tenure, Obama turned his attention to the goal of universal healthcare, which had proved elusive to previous presidents. And in doing so, he learned a lesson about the 5Cs of News.

July 22, 2009
The White House
Washington, DC

With healthcare in the balance, Obama staged the ultimate application of a president's "bully pulpit," a primetime, nationally televised news conference in the East Room of the White House.

For 59 minutes, Obama was masterfully effective: Well-phrased and on-message, urging Congress to pass his healthcare plan before its August recess.

But Obama saved his final question for an old friend from Illinois, Lynn Sweet of the Chicago Sun-Times. Sweet's question and Obama's answer were laden with the 5Cs, a potent combination that would overwhelm his healthcare message in the following days.



Q Recently Professor Henry Louis Gates Jr. was arrested at his home in Cambridge. What does that incident say to you and what does it say about race relations in America?

A I don't know, not having been there and not seeing all the facts what role race played in that, but I think it's fair to say . . . that the Cambridge Police acted stupidly in arresting somebody when there was already proof that they were in their own home.

Obama's Cambridge comments proved more interesting than his healthcare message, and so dominated media coverage for weeks after the news conference. The lost momentum on healthcare led to a summer of staunch congressional opposition and ultimately to a bill, the Affordable Care Act, that fell far short of the White House's original goals. The saga teaches all leaders a lesson about the power and peril of the 5Cs.

To maximize the opportunity and minimize the risks of engaging with the media, follow a three-part strategy:

- 1 Take what you know to be important and **make it interesting!** by including the 5Cs.
- 2 Always **resist the temptation** to say anything more interesting than that.
- 3 Where there is complexity, **simplify it yourself** to ensure accuracy.

