

Opinion: Cutting jobs helps budget, hurts more important areas

By Hagit Limor

The phone started ringing just after noon on a busy Tuesday in June. The axe was falling again.

Friends at Gannett who had suffered through multiple rounds of cutbacks, furloughs and layoffs had just gotten word that 700 more of their friends were about to get the call no one supporting a family, trying to pay off a car or struggling with a student loan wants to hear. Heads were about to roll.

Each time their phones rang, they wondered: Is this the source I worked for months, nights and weekends, so I could write the story my community needs to know, which incidentally, may help my company sell more newspapers? Or is this the call that will help my company save more money by eliminating my livelihood?

No one questions the challenges facing media outlets today, most especially on the print end of the business. We've all read the numbers on circulation and advertising revenue. We're also reading some other numbers with which you can't argue.

Gannett CEO Craig Dubow actually got a 21 percent bump on his performance bonus alone in 2010, a \$1.75 million payout as part of a total compensation package of \$9.4 million. That goes a long way toward 700 jobs, the salaries for which rarely reach into six figures.

I'm not picking on Mr. Dubow here. He's not the only media CEO earning millions while laying off thousands over the past few years. I'm not saying he or any of those leaders relish the thought of impacting people's lives so significantly, though

it must be nice to delegate that chore downhill.

What I'm saying is that it smells.

No journalist gets in this business to get rich. Most of us live on the low end of middle-class life. We do this because we believe our jobs are essential to our democracy. We serve as watchdogs over the thieves and cheats who would reign even more freely if they didn't have to deal with a free press. We serve to protect our communities.

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