

# AP'S DEFINITION OF "UNBIASED SOURCE OF NEWS:" DON'T CRITICIZE THE CLIENTS

Oh boy, I can't wait until First Draft's Athenae gets ahold of this.

An AP reporter apparently wrote, on Facebook, what a lot of bloggers have been saying about big media managers who ruin their companies: that the management ought to be held responsible. But then, one of his Facebook friends higher up the AP food chain ratted him out, and he got formally reprimanded for the comment. And now the AP suggests that the reporter got reprimanded because his comment might "damage AP's reputation as an unbiased source of news."

Richard Richtmyer, a Philadelphia-based newsman, set off Tuesday's tempest with a seemingly harmless comment posted to his Facebook profile late last month criticizing the executive management of newspaper publisher McClatchy, whose stock plummeted following a 2006 acquisition of San Jose-based Knight Ridder.

"It seems like the ones who orchestrated the whole mess should be losing their jobs or getting pushed into smaller quarters," Richtmyer wrote on May 28. "But they aren't."

McClatchy, like countless other newspaper publishers, happens to be a member of the AP's newsgathering cooperative. Had the comment been uttered in real life, it likely would have dissipated into the rank air of a Philly journo bar. But Richtmyer had some 51 AP colleagues as Facebook friends, some of them higher up in the

AP food chain. One turned out to be a "mole" – Richtmyer's description – and the reporter was given a firm talking-to by AP management, who put a reprimand letter in his employment file.

Paul Colford, a spokesman for New York-based AP, declined in an e-mail to address Richtmyer's case. But he said that "guidance offered to AP staff is that participation on Twitter and Facebook must conform with AP's News Values and Principles." That ethics policy says writers "must be mindful that opinions they express may damage the AP's reputation as an unbiased source of news. They must refrain from declaring their views on contentious public issues in any public forum."

Aside from the absurdity that Ron Fournier is still employed at AP, yet management is going after this guy, consider what this says about AP's understanding of "unbiased."

AP's management worries that it would be seen as "bias" to suggest that another corporation's management, having made a crappy business decision, should be held accountable. AP thinks it would be biased to suggest that capitalism is supposed to work the way it's supposed to work, for managers to be held accountable when they damage shareholder value.

No wonder no one is covering all the crappy business decisions MSM managers have been making of late—it'll get you accused of pro-capitalist bias, I guess.

Of course, that's probably not what's going on here—AP is probably a lot more concerned that their clients, including McClatchy, will get pissed off and stop paying for AP content if AP states the obvious that these managers made a poor business decision.

I guess MSM management isn't all that different from Rod Blagojevich, with his alleged efforts

to extort the Chicago Tribune to stop  
criticizing him.