



TYPE OF DOCUMENT : Policy Document
SUBJECT : Code of Ethics
(Work in Progress)

ISSUE DATE : December 7, 2012

RAPPLER CODE OF ETHICS

Introduction

Journalism and ethics must go hand in hand because credibility is what makes journalists effective in what they do: truth-telling. Diminished credibility also diminishes our ability to be believed by our audience and our public. This is why we shun any hint or perception of unethical behavior.

Ethics is ultimately about character – the ability to make right decisions when faced with tough choices. As practitioners, we cannot afford to think of individual or personal benefits alone because our choices will always reflect on our media organization, and even the profession of journalism. Repercussions will reverberate down the line.

Journalism is about public service. It's not about self-indulgence, personal interest, or even privileges. Whatever we do is in the interest of telling stories, providing useful, inspiring, or entertaining information.

With these principles in mind, we propose to draw up guidelines to help us navigate ethical minefields. It's work in progress that we can collectively enrich and fine-tune.

On Freebies and Gifts

1. Can we join raffles?

Avoid tricky situations that are ethical traps like raffles with giveaways such as iPhones, refrigerators, TV, and other expensive items. They're tricky because if you refuse the gift, you'll be seen as a kill-joy or a self-righteous journalist. Go and join the party and partake of the Christmas feast and exchange gifts with friends and sources of your choice but try to avoid the raffle.

2. Can we accept food?

Food is more acceptable. Share with colleagues and the newsroom to spread the Christmas cheer.

3. If we set an interview and we're invited for lunch or dinner, and the source pays, is that all right?

It's best to conduct interviews in the office of the source so that information and documents are easily accessible. If this is not ideal—the source is free only during lunch or dinner—pay your way, most especially if it's a critical story you're writing. Or try to invite for coffee (less expensive). If the source chooses a hotel or some expensive restaurant because it's the most convenient for him/her and insists on paying, let him or her. But offer to pay for coffee at least and take care of the tip. Then say you'll pay the next time around, and of course choose a cheaper place!

4. Can we take sponsored trips by sources, companies, etc?

As a general rule, no. We pay our way for trips that promise stories. If there are no stories but only a junket, that's a definite no-no. If a company invites us to a newsworthy event, we consult first with the editors. A clear example would be an invitation to a conflict or disaster area that only the military has access to, or any similar coverage where access is limited. The decision will be guided by the principles stated here. If we decide to cover and do a story, disclosure will be a requirement.

5. What if it's a free super expensive trip that also promises a story – like reviewing a plush hotel for life style, or diving in Tubattaha, or covering a sports event overseas? Can we take it?

We strive for a middle ground or seek workable arrangements. Sales/marketing can enter into exchange deals so that we are not totally beholden. Reporters cannot negotiate directly on their own and should coordinate with editors or direct supervisors. Editors will have the last say on who will be assigned and whether we will go with the coverage.

6. Can we accept freebies in the course of coverage – press conferences, product launches, etc?

General rule is no. You attend press conferences and product launches to get a story and not freebies. But if there's no way to avoid ballpens, T-shirts, notebooks, bags with kits, those are acceptable. Accepting gift certificates, gadgets, shoes, etc is frowned upon.

In case of huge product launches (i.e., Samsung) when an invite-only is the mode of coverage, we attend the newsworthy ones that we think would be unable to cover fully without our presence. Gadgets for our review will have to be returned after our review is done. In case of outdated gadgets, consult editors on what to do with them.

7. Can we accept gadgets for review?

Check them out for your review but once you're done, return them. If sponsoring company insists you keep them, say it's against company policy.

8. Is there an acceptable ceiling or limit to gifts we can accept during birthdays or special occasions?

Ceilings are artificial. Special occasions are occasions for gift-giving and it may be impolite for you to refuse gifts. If these gifts are outrageously expensive, however, you are advised to return them. What is "outrageously expensive?" It's subjective but as a guide, let's agree on a P1,000 ceiling. Say it's against company policy to accept gifts.

9. Can we go out on expensive lunch or dinner treats?

Overall guideline is, keep it modest. If it's a birthday treat, we go by guideline spelled out in No. 8 and incorporate No. 3. If you can't avoid it, pitch in and share in the cost. Don't be purely at the receiving end.

In case of doubt, consult your editors.

On conflict of interest

Rappler has a strict policy with respect to conflict of interest. This is not limited to political parties or advocacy organizations. In general, staff are required to disclose and avoid potential conflicts of interest situations, where loyalty to a person, group or institution could affect their ability to report about them truthfully.

Staff are also advised to avoid taking part in activities or being part of organizations which could limit or compromise their independence and endanger their professional integrity.



On anonymous sources

As a rule, we always identify our sources in our stories. In our interviews and coverages, we are expected to inform sources that they will be duly identified and quoted. We are discouraged from giving sources false assurances of anonymity in stories.

There are exceptions to this rule, however, when it comes to sensitive stories, especially investigative reports or exposés. We use anonymous sources based on the following conditions:


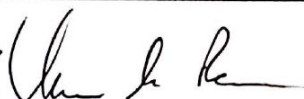
- 1.) When the source has a proven track record of truthfulness and there is no one else who can provide such information immediately
- 2.) When the source is an insider or a whistle-blower whose life will be put at risk or whose job will be endangered if he is identified, but whose information can be verified with other sources or vetted in documents
- 3.) When the source's information is confirmed by other independent sources or documents.

We also do not allow just a general reference to "anonymous source" or "anonymous sources" in our stories. We exert effort to describe who they are and what they do. A close adviser of the President; a military officer who attended the command briefing; a senator who was privy to meetings that were held; etcetera.

Whenever documents or stories cited in articles are available online, we either embed these source documents or hyperlink to the source material.

EFFECTIVE DATE

These guidelines were drafted in 07 December 2012 and are updated from time to time.

Prepared by:	Approved by:		EFFECTIVE DATE:
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ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

I hereby acknowledge receipt of a copy of the Rappler Code of Ethics
and agree to abide by said rules and regulations

Received by: _____
(Signature over printed name)

Date Received: _____

cc: 201 File