

◆ An Editor-in-Chief's Perspective on Recruiting and Training a Managing Editor

Memory is indeed selective! When asked to write these comments concerning the problems of finding the "right" managing editor, my 1st thought was that there are none. As I complete my 5th year as editor-in-chief of *Stroke*, the management of the journal is so effective that I am privileged to spend my efforts on policy and the science aspects of publication; the nightmares of 5 years ago have been forgotten. That is, almost forgotten until now.

When I accepted the invitation of the American Heart Association (AHA) to become editor, I looked forward to taking over the leadership and contributing to the continued evolution of the premier journal on cerebrovascular disease in the world. I had served as an associate editor for *Stroke*, had been on a number of editorial boards, and was a reviewer for many others. My predecessors, associate editors, and I had many exciting ideas to make the journal even stronger (1).

Everything seemed perfect until reality struck. Whatever expertise I had was all on the clinical and science side of stroke. My experience was in reviewing manuscripts and evaluating their importance for publication. To serve as editor-in-chief, I would need to establish an editorial office at Indiana University and address all the problems of the nuts and bolts of its daily operations. I soon became painfully aware that in addition to having no experience in these areas, I also had no expertise. It is my impression that the invitation for me to write this article came because a similar situation generally exists for most new editors of scientific journals and that new editors who have not inherited an ongoing managing editorial team have been equally panicked.

In response to my repeatedly voiced fears, the outgoing editor, the outgoing managing editor, and Vicki Sullivan, director of scientific publishing for AHA, all assured me that the daily operations would be the managing editor's job. They said all I had to worry about was hiring a good managing editor. This did not greatly reassure me.

AHA policy is to establish the editorial

American Heart Association Journal Managing Editor

Dimensional Data:

Immediate Supervisor: Journal Editor

Employed by: Editor's Institution

AHA Supervisor: Scientific Publishing Director

Function: This position is responsible for facilitating journal manuscript flow among authors, reviewers, editorial board members, and AHA National Center.

Responsibilities:

1. Set up editorial office.
2. Maintain editorial office files, mail copies, manuscripts, and postage.
3. Coordinate printing of stationery, envelopes, and forms.
4. Receive mail from and distribute mail to authors and reviewers.
5. Check all manuscripts for completeness: references, tables, figures, suitable for reproduction, legends, abstracts, permission to use previously copyrighted material, and mailing address for proof.
6. Notify National Center about waived page charges for invited papers.
7. Send copyright forms provided by National Center to authors once manuscript is accepted.
8. Refer authors to National Center for estimate of cost of printing color figures.
9. Keep prepublication process timely.
10. Send acknowledgment, revision, rejection, and acceptance letters to authors.
11. Send accepted manuscripts for redacting to National Center on schedule.
12. Notify National Center of editorial board additions, changes, deletions, as they relate to complimentary subscriptions.
13. Coordinate with National Center Scientific and Corporate Meetings staff all logistics for annual editorial board meeting.
14. Prepare staff and office budget, which is approved by Scientific Publishing Committee for editor's approval.
15. Prepare semiannual statistical report for Scientific Publishing Committee and other reports for editor as requested.
16. Maintain membership in Council of Biology Editors and attend annual CBE meetings (items included in office budget).
17. Provide for orderly transition to new editorial office at end of term.
18. Perform other duties as assigned by editor.

Minimum Qualifications:

College degree

High-level word-processing experience

Database experience (added 1996)

Demonstrated interpersonal skills

One year of journal-publication experience in journal production

Knowledge of medical terminology

Demonstrated skill in oral and written communications

Demonstrated problem-solving skills

Demonstrated project-management skills

Figure 1 Managing-editor job description used by the American Heart Association in 1991. We added "database experience" to the list of minimum qualifications.

office at the institution of the editor-in-chief. This allows the editor-in-chief to work closely with the editorial staff on a daily basis. The previous editorial office, in Pittsburgh, had been quite effective, so I first tried to convince the outgoing managing editor, Nancy Lynch, to move her entire operations and herself to Indianapolis. This simple solution failed because neither she nor her colleagues wished to leave their homes and families in Pittsburgh. Despite this, I was still in a better position than most because of my access to the experienced advice of Vicki Sullivan. The CBE Short Course for Journal Editors was of considerable value. In addition, Lynch agreed to serve as a consultant. With the help of the 2 of them and armed with the assurance that my job as editor would be what I had originally envisioned once I hired the right person as managing editor, we developed a plan of action.

First, Sullivan gave me the AHA job description for the position (Figure 1). Then we listed the qualities felt to be most critical. Administrative skills, publishing experience, excellent writing skills, and some medical knowledge were essential. Computer expertise was added to the list. The individual also had to be highly motivated and willing to work long hours when necessary. Although a person with experience on the staff of a peer-reviewed scientific journal would have been ideal, we knew this might not be possible in our area. Those with journal experience probably were employed already, although those not happily employed would be a potential pool of candidates. Finally, knowing that I did not want to conduct this search more than once, we asked applicants to make a commitment of intent for 5 years, the length of my initial term.

With the help of Human Resources at Indiana University, we ran an ad in the *Indianapolis Star* (Figure 2) and within days, the first of many applications began arriving.

When reviewing the stack of applications, I was surprised and relieved to see a large number of very impressive resumes. From these, a smaller group was selected of

Managing Editor

For an international professional journal in cerebrovascular disease. This position is responsible for managing all editorial aspects including facilitating the manuscript process from submission through publication, rewriting some manuscripts, and hiring and supervising editorial staff. Minimum qualifications are a college degree related to business, journalism, or health science, at least one year of publications experience in journal production, some knowledge of medical terminology, and word processing and database experience.

Figure 2 Ad used in 1991 to recruit the *Stroke* managing editor. To update the ad, the underlined copy was added.

those who had substantial publications and administrative experience and met our other criteria. A spreadsheet was developed so that comparisons and ranking would be easier. This sheet included the name of the applicant, degree, background, comments, and a provisional ranking.

The 7 top applicants were selected and interviewed. After the interviews, 2 initial finalists were selected, and copies of their resumes and writing samples were reviewed by Sullivan and Lynch. After this, they independently interviewed each applicant by phone. Fortunately, all 3 of us agreed that the strongest candidate was Marilyn Yurk.

After that, the rest was easy. My role in helping Yurk learn the ropes was simply to meet with her once a day for the 1st couple of months to discuss individual manuscripts, policy, problems, and correspondence. I made it clear that although I would leave routine management to her, I wanted to be kept well informed of everything that was going on with the editorial office. The *Stroke* office now runs smoothly, and Yurk does everything possible to make my job easier. As an example, Yurk generally drafts responses to nonroutine correspondence that I receive. She anticipates how I would respond to specific letters and prepares answers in articulate English. Typically, all I need to do is read the material and make sure I agree. Most of the time I can then sign "my response" and give it to the staff to mail. This saves me considerable time.

More importantly, the success of the operations of a scientific journal can be partially

measured by manuscript-processing time such as time from submission to 1st decision and time from submission to acceptance. *Stroke* has an average time to 1st decision of under 1 month, and an average time from submission to acceptance of 13 weeks. Most of our turnaround policies are based on a 1-day standard. We send review requests within 24 hours of manuscript receipt, and once a reviewer agrees to review, the manuscript package is mailed within 1 day. In these areas, our office, which handles about 1000 manuscripts a year, is competitive with any peer-reviewed journal in the world in terms of both speed and quality.

Other reflections of the managing editor are the overall quality of the staff and the atmosphere in the editorial office. Our staff members, all competent and well trained, work as a team to process manuscripts efficiently and willingly go to great lengths to help reviewers and authors. I believe their contacts with reviewers and authors are conducted with tact and respect. All of this results in an efficient and productive editorial office, as well as a pleasant place to work.

As a final note, I would agree that my advisors were right when they suggested that if I found the right managing editor, my job as editor would be much easier and much more fun. Ⓛ

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Reference

1. Dyken ML. Evolution, not revolution [editorial]. *Stroke* 1992;23:1-2.