PRISM

How Solutions Journalism Can Help Reshape Newsrooms for Workers
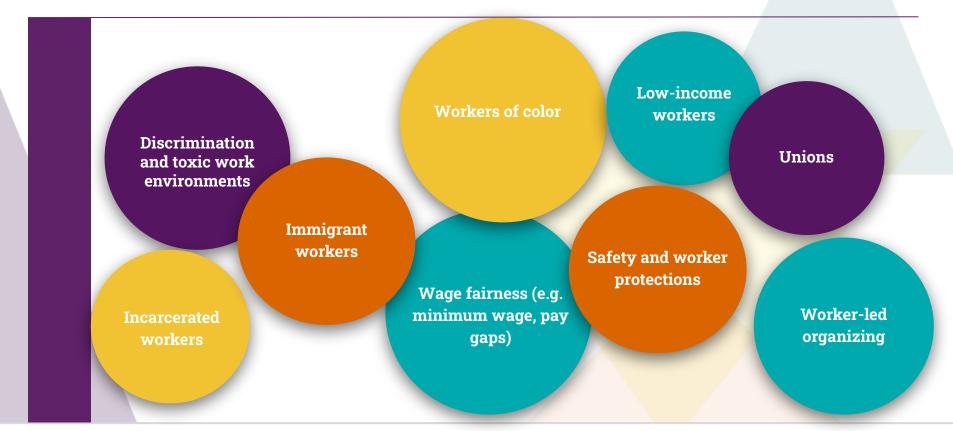
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Prism | About Us

At Prism, we believe that justice requires the full story.

When Prism was established in 2019, it was because we knew that the status quo media landscape wasn't reflecting enough of the truth—and it wasn't bringing us closer to our vision of collective liberation and justice. We saw a different path forward, one that we could forge by disrupting and dismantling toxic narratives, uncovering the hard truths of injustice alongside the people experiencing the acute impacts of injustice, and providing a platform for people of color to tell their own stories, and those of their communities.

Mission

Through in-depth and thought-provoking journalism, Prism reflects the lived experiences of people most impacted by injustice. As an independent and nonprofit newsroom led by journalists of color, we tell stories from the ground up: to disrupt harmful narratives, and to inform movements for justice.

Workers' Rights Coverage - Our Focus Areas

Discrimination and toxic work environments

Workers of color

Low-income workers

Unions

Immigrant workers

Incarcerated workers

Wage fairness (e.g. minimum wage, pay gaps)

Safety and worker protections

Worker-led organizing

Journalistic Approaches

News Coverage

Investigations

Solutions Journalism

Q&As/As-Told-To

Daily and weekly stories on ongoing issues that develop over time

Deep dives into a single workplace or issue, built on long-term deep reporting, trusted sources, and documents

Four Pillars: 1) RESPONSE to social problem; 2) EVIDENCE of how it's working; 3) LIMITATIONS; 4) INSIGHT on how others can replicate the solution

Offers readers unfiltered direct access to workers' voices and perspectives

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Worker-Centered Solutions Stories - Examples

How a majority BIPOC worker co-op is disrupting the field of therapy

A therapist collective is changing how mental health services are offered in Ridgewood, Queens

Unions offer graduate student workers a stronger platform to secure living wages and reasonable workloads

Universities depend on graduate student workers' labor but won't provide adequate pay without the pressure of collective bargaining efforts

Ban the Box policies reduce job barriers for formerly incarcerated people

Ban the Box and additional legislation can help formerly incarcerated people find material and personal fulfillment

It's past time to celebrate migrant-led labor organizing

For decades, the labor movement has treated undocumented workers as "unorganizable." Now these workers are doing some of the most innovative labor organizing in the U.S.

Case Study - How Our Reporting Led to Internal Change

The push toward a four-day workweek is gaining momentum

by Montse Reyes   May 18th, 2022

Prism adopts a four-day workweek

by Ashton Lattimore   September 15th, 2022

After a successful summer pilot, Prism staff members reported transformative results in their mental health, work-life balance, and productivity, and unanimously recommended to continue the schedule long term

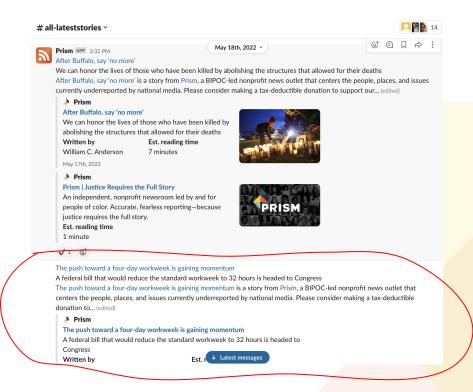@prismreports | prismreports.org

Foundation and Backstory

- Summer 2020: Experimented with four-day workweek, using staggered schedules
- 2020-22: Half-day Fridays as status-quo (36 hour workweek)
- Prism has been reporting on workers' rights since 2020, including the workplace experiences of journalists
  - <u>Freelance journalists are hanging on by a thread. Could organizing help?</u> (Dec. 14, 2020)
  - <u>Coronavirus has upended many lives, but immigrant journalists on visas face a grim reality</u> (June 23, 2020)
  - <u>Harassment and threats are 'part of the job' for women in media</u> (Apr. 26, 2021)
- Organizational Culture: From the beginning, focused on work-life balance, mental health, and supporting staff as whole people

The Catalyst: Solutions Reporting by Montse Reyes

The story: [The push toward a four-day workweek is gaining momentum](#), published May 18, 2022, at the height of "Great Resignation" discourse

- **Problem & RESPONSE**: "With time to reevaluate their careers, working conditions, and quality of life, nearly 48 million Americans quit their jobs in 2021. ... Some people believe a four-day workweek could be the answer in the quest for a better work-life balance."
- **EVIDENCE**: study found 20% increase in productivity; time and money saved on commute, mental health improvements; reduced barriers for employees with caregiving responsibilities (primarily women and BIPOC)
- **LIMITATIONS**: Most of the companies trying it are in "tech, finance, or other traditionally white-collar industries"; risk of impact to benefits
- **INSIGHT**: "ByteChek made its way to the shortened workweek policy gradually. First the company consulted with their team and analyzed their Friday workloads to maintain output with fewer hours. That started with "Quiet Fridays," where employees didn't schedule internal or external meetings, which gave way to half-day Fridays and now, a four-day workweek."

Discovery: How Prism's Leadership Noticed the Story

The Four Day Workweek Pilot

Rather than jumping right into a permanent change, we designed a pilot to test it out and make a more informed decision once we had more data.

- Finite Length of Time: 12 weeks
- How would we measure success?
  - Hard Metrics: Story output, audience numbers/traffic (social engagement, pageviews, visitors)
  - Soft Metrics: Work life balance impact, mental health
- Measurement and evaluation
  - Audience metrics tools (Parse.ly, etc.), publishing stats on Wordpress, social media engagement metrics
  - Qualitative staff survey asking about mental health, productivity, work-life balance, with space for narrative answers on challenges, benefits, a yes/no question on whether they recommended a permanent shift; anything else leadership could do to support adjustment

Results and Reporting Out

The story: [Prism adopts a four-day workweek](#)

- Pilot was a resounding success, team unanimously recommended following through - but final decision rested with the leadership team
- Had to work through resistance, sometimes from surprising places
- Reporting out is part of being accountable to staff, board, funders, audience
- Needed to consider the function of reporting out - were we asking for permission or informing people after decision was made?

How Solutions Journalism Shaped the Report-Out (1)

RESPONSE to well-documented problem of journalist burnout
- "As corrosive as the 24-hour news cycle has been to our collective attention spans and the quality of news in our country, it's been just as damaging to the journalists living and reporting on the day-to-day churn of news, much of it complex, difficult, and sometimes even traumatizing. At Prism, we couldn't imagine a better time for our newsroom to explore different ways of showing up in this moment."

INSIGHT that other newsrooms could consider in trying this out
- "Prism decided to pilot a 32-hour, four-day workweek for our full-time staff this summer. For 12 weeks, our staff kept a regular work schedule of Monday through Thursday. … During the pilot, we adapted workflows to allow for rapid-response coverage of news that broke late in the week, followed by alternative times for our team to step away from work. In accordance with our ethics, we also ensured that editors remained reachable to swiftly address any necessary corrections or other urgent matters that arose on Fridays."

How Solutions Journalism Shaped the Report-Out (2)

EVIDENCE in terms of audience metrics, survey results, editorial workflow, all documented and measured during the pilot period

- "In a survey … team members reported improved work-life balance, mental health, and productivity. Staff have reported saving money on child care, finding additional time to attend medical appointments, starting therapy, working on creative projects, returning to hobbies, and spending more time with family."
- "Even as we shifted into a four-day workweek, during the pilot, we hit our editorial production goals, publishing an average of eight stories per week. We also met and exceeded our audience growth goals, with traffic to Prism's website exceeding projected targets (nearly doubling them in June, thanks to our coverage of the Dobbs decision), and our social media channels continued their upward trajectory, with our Twitter and Instagram growing 20% and nearly 7%, respectively, compared with Q2 of 2022."

LIMITATIONS, i.e. naming some of the challenges and potential pitfalls, and noting why our newsroom was well-situated for this shift

- "While the shortened workweek did pose a few challenges—including smoothing out cross-team collaboration for stories published later in the week, coordinating meeting schedules with external partners, and occasionally feeling the need to work late—all staff felt the benefits far outweighed any concerns, which could be adapted to over time.

Putting it all together:

How can you bring pro-worker solutions into your own newsroom?

How to Make it Work: Lay the Foundations

Journalists are workers too.

This is about understanding that fundamental truth, and shaping newsroom culture around it. Some ways to shift culture:

- Look to your content, especially around labor issues. Consider how that creates or reflects your context.
    - For discussion: What point of view does your work express about workplace issues? Whose perspectives are centered?
- Learn from peer newsrooms. Reach out and learn how they've made culture shifts and/or built cultures that welcome change.
- Get educated. Attend workshops, seminars, conferences and bring back your findings to help seed these conversations.
- Change must find support at the top, with leadership. Often, culture change can be helped along by strategic hiring at all levels.

How to Make it Work: Create a Pipeline

Make sure there are channels for ideas to make their way from stories and staff to decision makers - we can't assume HR and Operations folks, or leadership, are reading every story, or reading it with an eye toward how it maps onto the newsroom as a workplace.

Potential pipelines:
- RSS feed
- Forwarding individual stories
- Suggestion box
- Town halls
- Union!

For discussion: What's your role within your newsroom, and how could you use that positionality to set up a pipeline?

How to Make it Work: Design a Pilot

For new initiatives, design a pilot. There's no need to make a permanent shift all at once — give yourself time to test, learn, and adapt. Things to think about as you craft a pilot:

- What problem are you trying to solve? Pilot should be a **RESPONSE** to a genuine issue faced by workers in your newsroom

- Consider what metrics you'll evaluate the pilot's success on (what will your **EVIDENCE** of success/failure look like?)

- Track any snags or challenges along the way (**LIMITATIONS**)

- Be transparent with your **INSIGHTS** after the fact, consider publishing a story or news release so that other newsrooms can benefit from your experience

How to Make it Work: Report Out

Be accountable to your measures of success, to your stakeholders (staff, board, funders, audience, partners), and to the larger media community. Share your experience, your successes and struggles, and your insights.

As you craft one or more versions of a report-out, consider your audiences and the purpose of the report. Are you trying to persuade a decisionmaker? Informing people who'll be impacted?

How Solutions Journalism Can Influence Your Newsroom

1

Foundations

How is your newsroom inviting conversations about labor and workers' rights in the newsroom? What kinds of stories are you publishing?

2

Create a Pipeline

Make sure there are ways for ideas from your reporting to bubble up to decision-makers. Consider a Slack channel, suggestion box, regular town halls or open discussions

3

Design a Pilot

Plan to bring about changes gradually, and with intention. Decide in advance - what does success look like? What will be the process for making a decision at the end?

4

Report it Out

Share your experience - your challenges and your successes - with key stakeholders for accountability, and with the wider media community. Change can be contagious!

Questions?

Contact Information

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And keep up with Prism's reporting at prismreports.org.