

## **Inside the Newsroom: Quick Questions for...Sharon Liang**

From HBC's Sound Bites Blog

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HBC's gone bicoastal, recently opening our first west coast office in LA and hiring [Sharon Liang](#), former head of the editorial section at *The Daily Journal*. At *The Daily Journal*—the nation's largest daily legal publication—Sharon stood at the forefront of the intersection of journalism and the law. After working at the pub for more than three years, Sharon has brought her skills and knowhow to HBC, and she gave us the inside scoop lawyers and PR pros alike are dying to know about what really happens in the newsroom.

### **What was it like working at a daily newspaper?**

One of the most exciting aspects of working at a daily newspaper is the fact that well—you're putting together a newspaper every single day. Each morning, the editors met to talk about what was new that day and brainstorm possible story angles. I was constantly learning, and I loved that. On the other hand, let's be honest, this is also the most stressful part of the job. But everyone is working together to meet deadlines, and there's something really special to be said about that level of teamwork.

### **Sounds like it can get pretty hectic in the newsroom. What can PR professionals do to best position their clients with reporters and editors?**

One of the best ways to build a relationship with a reporter or editor is to make yourself, or the client, available. It sounds obvious, but we all know how work gets busy, and before you realize it, hours have passed. Whether it's returning a call or responding to an email—timing is key because everyone is operating under a hard deadline. Opportunities to contribute a byline on a particular topic, or to be quoted in a story, depend on getting back to the reporter or editor within their timeframe. And even if you can't talk on-the-record, sometimes the reporter just needs some background information—and if you are able to lend some knowledge, most reporters don't forget that and will seek you out first the next time they need sources.

### **You ran the editorial section, what advice can you offer about byline submissions?**

When it comes to bylines, writing guidelines are an editor's best friend. They are editing a hefty number of articles, and adhering to rules on word limit, citation format, and writing-style preferences really help them stay efficient and on top of their workload. The biggest sin I came across was writing too much. Believe me, I know how hard it is to keep writing succinct, but consider this: If you can get your point across using the least number of words, chances are the target audience will read your entire article—and decide to pass it on to fellow colleagues or reach out to you directly to discuss. It's all about increasing maximum readability, and following a publication's particular rules will help you do just that.

### **Sometimes an unexpected matter comes up, and a byline due date is missed. How should PR professionals handle those situations?**

Editors understand that urgent matters can arise unexpectedly, and deadlines may need to be extended. The sticky part is that editors usually save space in the publication for a particular article, and when that isn't delivered on time, it translates into empty space that has to be filled. That's incredibly stressful for the

editorial staff. Whenever I found myself in that predicament, what was really helpful was when the PR professional offered something else in its place, which if accepted, will make the editor very happy. Of course, the proposed replacement should be suitable to that publication. But even if the proposed piece doesn't work, the gesture will speak volumes and can only help with your future interactions with that particular editor.

**Can you share some thoughts about your transition from journalism to PR?**

Well, as a journalist, you are expected to remain neutral—no taking sides on an issue. And coming from a California-based publication, we mainly focused on legal issues affecting the state or news that had a nationwide impact. With PR, I am exposed to a broad spectrum of issues and have more room to be creative, whether it's learning about the many different types of work our clients are involved in or taking an out-of-the-box approach to a media pitch. The framework around this job is much more flexible, and the freedom it provides is quite exciting.