Harvard Kennedy School Communications Program

Some basic guidelines for starting to edit:

- Read the draft all the way through fighting temptation to edit as you are going along.
- Look for the easy stuff: typos, grammar, usage, punctuation, consistency. If you're editing for an in-house publication, make sure the piece follows in-house style. (If there is no in-house style guide, then defer to a standard style guide like the *Associated Press Style Guide* or *The Chicago Manual of Style*.
- Consider the structure of the piece. Does it flow logically? Is the main point made clearly? Are the transitions from one paragraph to the next smoothly made? Does everything seem connected? Does the writer raise an issue and never resolve it? Does that issue need to be in the piece at all?
- Question all facts, names, titles, dates, locations, math.
- If a sentence appears wordy and can be recast more directly, offer a more direct and clearer version.
- Remove anything redundant.
- If a word can be cut out, cut it out.
- If there are many tangential asides, question whether the tangent is truly tangential. If not, make it part of the piece. If so, does it really need to be in the piece?
- If the piece runs long, don't go in first trying to cut big swaths of copy. Look to tighten up the writing wherever possible and to remove everything that isn't essential to the argument.
- Fight the temptation to rewrite the piece. If there's a grammatical error or a redundancy, make the suggested cut right on the copy. But if a section seems unclear or not worded as well as you might have written it, rather than rewrite it, offer a comment on what's unclear in the margin and perhaps offer a suggestion on how possibly to rewrite it, but leave the actual rewriting to the person whose name will go on the piece. (If you're collaborating on a piece and will share a byline, ignore this and have at it.)

Consider this draft below of a prospective op-ed piece for *The New York Times*. As it appears below, it runs about 100 words longer than the publication's upper-end word count limit.

It's every job seeker's nightmare--having an offer rescinded. In a story circulating widely on the internet (philosophysmoker.blogspot.com), "W," a newly minted Ph.D. received a faculty job offer from Nazareth College's Philosophy Department and soon after the school withdrew that offer. What crime did W, a woman, commit to cause such a dramatic censure? She negotiated.

So far, we have only emails W released—she expressed enthusiasm and then offered five improvements to the offer that would "make [her] decision easier". The College replied by suggesting the position may not be "suitable" for her and withdrew their offer. This rather extreme response has fueled much speculation—did she misjudge the College's resources? Did the College have another candidate they liked just as well? Many bloggers, with the benefit of

hindsight, have criticized W for over-reaching, being too aggressive, using email for a delicate interaction, or even for negotiating in the first place. What compels us to weigh in on this matter is the years of research we have done suggesting that the College and the blogosphere's reactions to W would likely be different if she were a man.

Can we definitely prove our thesis that W's gender had something to do with the search committee's actions? Of course not. To do that we would need an identical situation where W was a man. Yet, our collective negotiation research on literally thousands of participants shows that men and women are judged differently for negotiating on their own behalf. The female negotiator is deemed to be more aggressive, less likeable, and is less desirable to work with than the male negotiator, regardless of the fact that both negotiators asked for the same amount, using the exact same script. Moreover, people give less to the woman than they do to the man and, as we saw in the case of W, the consequences can be even graver.

Why does this happen? It is because people judge identical behavior by men and women differently, particularly when the behavior violates how we think men and women should behave. A person who boldly defends an idea might be inspiring if he is a man and opinionated if she is woman. A person who strongly articulates their qualifications for a job might be judged as assertive if he is a man and over-confident if she is a woman. A person who leads in an authoritative way may be seen as a strong leader if he is a man and "bossy" if she is a woman. This double standard exists because we, as a society, still have entrenched norms about how men and women "ought" to behave. Even in society today, we still imagine men should be the strong, assertive, breadwinners and women the warm and selfless team players. When men and women violate these stereotypic expectations, many of us think less of them.

Although many bloggers have quibbled about the specifics of how W presented her negotiation requests, our research suggests the "backlash" she endured (whereby the College did not even engage in the negotiation) stems more from violation of gender norms than her negotiating approach. In our experience, faculty search committees make choices about who will receive a job offer after review of the candidate's research and teaching evaluations, multiple letters of reference, and extensive face-to-face interactions, including a day-long campus visit with numerous faculty. Search committees have ample opportunities to assess a candidate's "fit" in their culture and in this case they chose W. Yet, according to the information made public, all of this evidence was essentially nullified by one email in which W negotiated for an adjusted offer.

We suspect that the strong reaction against W's attempted negotiation stemmed from a visceral—and likely subconscious—discomfort with a woman asking for more for herself. We expect that people on the search committee, and some readers, may be appalled at the idea this case has anything to do with gender. However, as popularized in Malcolm Gladwell's bestselling book*, Blink*, people are often not conscious of the norms that govern their judgments. Moreover, people can subconsciously use these norms as guideposts even when they consciously judge these norms to be repugnant.

We share our research-based interpretation of the case of W to prevent future incidents like this. We find this case troubling for at least four reasons. First, the Philosophy Department at Nazareth College lost a job candidate that they really liked (that is, before she negotiated). Filling a faculty job takes tremendous time and resources, and in this instance it resulted in them losing a candidate they wanted to hire. Second, W lost a good job in a job market where vacancies are scarce. Third, it is possible that upon hearing about this incident, other women will decide it is too risky to negotiate and this will further widen the gap between men and women. Fourth, individuals from Nazareth College might never reflect on whether gender might have influenced their decision and if it did take steps to rectify the situation.

Our hope is that we can all become more aware about how gender can color our interpretation of negotiation behavior. We hope that by raising awareness to this possibility that employers will be less likely to lose talented candidates and female as well as male candidates will have more freedom to negotiate mutually beneficial agreements with their employers.

Here's how I went through and did a first pass on editing with comments in the text in in margin comments:

It's every job seeker's nightmare--having an offer rescinded. In a story circulating widely on the internet (philosophysmoker.blogspot.com), "W," a newly minted Ph.D. received a faculty job offer from Nazareth College's Philosophy Department and soon after the school withdrew that offer.

What crime did W, a woman, commit to cause such a dramatic censure? She negotiated.

So far, we have only emails W released—she expressed enthusiasm and then offered five improvements to the offer that would "make [her] decision easier." The College replied by suggesting the position may not be "suitable" for her and withdrew its offer.

Did W misjudge the College's resources? Did the College have another candidate it liked just as well? While many bloggers have criticized W for over-reaching, being too aggressive, using email for a delicate interaction, or even negotiating in the first place, our research suggests that the College and the blogosphere's reactions to W would likely be different if she were a man.

Can we definitely prove our thesis that W's gender had something to do with the search committee's actions? Of course not. To do that we would need an identical situation where W was a man. Yet, our collective negotiation research on thousands of participants shows that men and women are judged differently for negotiating on their own behalf. The female negotiator is deemed to be more aggressive, less likeable, and less desirable to work with than the male negotiator, regardless of whether both negotiators asked for the same amount, using

Commented [S1]: Do you mean "definitively" here?

the exact same script. Moreover, people give less to the woman than they do to the man and, as we saw in the case of W, the consequences can be even graver.

Why does this happen? Because people judge identical behavior by men and women differently, particularly when the behavior violates how we think men and women should behave. A person who boldly defends an idea might be inspiring if he is a man and opinionated if she is woman. A person who strongly articulates qualifications for a job might be judged assertive if he is a man and over-confident if she is a woman. A person who leads authoritatively may be seen as a strong leader if he is a man and bossy if she is a woman. Clearly, we still have entrenched norms about how men and women ought to behave. We still imagine men should be the strong, assertive, breadwinners and women the warm and selfless team players. When they violate stereotypic expectations, many think less of them.

Our research suggests the backlash W endured with the College not even engaging in the negotiation stems more from her violation of gender norms than her negotiating approach. Faculty search committees routinely make choices about who will receive a job offer after review of the candidate's research and teaching evaluations, multiple letters of reference, and extensive face-to-face interactions, including a day-long campus visit with numerous faculty. Search committees have ample opportunities to assess a candidate's fit in their culture. In this case, Nazareth chose W. Yet, according to the information made public, all of this evidence was essentially nullified by that one email W sent to negotiate for an adjusted offer.

We suspect that the bloggers' strong reaction against W's attempted negotiation stemmed from a visceral — and likely subconscious — discomfort with a woman asking for more for herself. We expect that people on the search committee, and some readers, may be appalled at the idea this case has anything to do with gender. As Malcolm Gladwell observed in *Blink* (publisherTK, yearTK), however, people are often not conscious of the norms that govern their judgments. In fact, people can subconsciously use these norms as guideposts even when they consciously judge them to be repugnant.

We find this case troubling for at least four reasons. First, the philosophy department at Nazareth College invested a tremendous about of time and resources only to lose a job candidate it had really liked, before she negotiated. Second, W lost a good job in a job market where vacancies are scarce. Third, other women hearing about this incident may decide it is too risky to negotiate –further widening the gap between men and women. Fourth, individuals from Nazareth College might never reflect on whether gender might have influenced their decision and, if it did, take steps to rectify the situation.

We hope that we all can become more aware about how gender can color our interpretation of negotiation behavior. We hope that by raising awareness to this possibility that employers will be less likely to lose talented candidates. We hope that female as well as male candidates will have more freedom to negotiate mutually beneficial agreements with their employers.

Commented [S2]: Sentence doesn't quite scan right. Seems like the "consequences" here refer to the giving "less to the woman" but what you seem to want it to refer to is the negotiating in the first place. Since you're talking in this piece about negotiation rather than pay disparity (a whole other op-ed), perhaps clearer to cast this sentence as something like:

"Moreover, as evidenced by W's case, the consequences for a woman who dares to negotiate can be far graver than for a man."

Or something similar?

Commented [S3]: I'd delete this to avoid the agreement problem (person – their) and avoid having to use "his or her." Clear enough if you cut "their." [Note to David: Some publications now accept using "their" even if the noun it accompanies is singular. Some don't.]

Commented [S4]: Do you mean "suspect" here?

Commented [S5]: This is clear in the entire piece and is strongly stated in your closing paragraph, so don't think you need it here.

Commented [S6]: There are three "We hopes" in this paragraph. It seems like you want to build to the most important of these three "We hopes…" in this final paragraph and perhaps end with something like,

Mostly, we hope that female as well as male candidates will have more freedom to negotiate mutually beneficial agreements with their employers without the fear of TK.

The TK would be whatever that final takeaway is you want for readers.

If that final sentence is the strongest hope in these three, then suggest you move that strongest one to close on.

Suggested you change "Our hope" to "We hope" in beginning of paragraph because it builds a nice cadence throughout if you repeat the "we hope" and end with "Mostly, we hope…"

As I went through, I tried to correct what seemed off, cut what seemed unnecessary, and then in the margin pose questions about curious word choice or offer alternatives for what was written.

This is not dissimilar from the kinds of comments I offer on your pieces when I read them and offer comments. But it might be easier to get a sense of how the editing is working when it's not your words being edited.