

Module 1: What Solutions Journalism is Not

[00:00:12] In the first video, we talked about what solutions journalism is. It is rigorous, compelling coverage of responses to social problems. We went over the four criteria to apply when writing or producing solutions journalism story. That's response, insight, evidence and limitations. These criteria are the foundation of how we define solutions journalism in practice. Now let's tackle about what solutions journalism isn't and how to watch out for impostors. At the Solutions Journalism Network. We have found that to explain what solutions journalism is, it is often effective to offer examples of what it isn't. Here are seven examples of solutions journalism impostors we've all seen in the media. The silver Bullet. These stories are often seen in the tech and innovation sections. They describe new gadgets in glowing terms, often referring to them as life savers. Also, of note money is sometimes considered a silver bullet favor to a friend. You can sometimes distinguish the imposter because the sole predominant voice is that of the organization being profiled, like the silver bullet story. It doesn't have much in the way of a to be sure paragraph, i.e., the caveats to success and appears as thinly veiled public relations. Example in the piece Budweiser is turning six cities into labs for responsible drinking. Published in the Huffington Post. Everyone's quotes work for AB InBev. Here's another one. Think tank opinion journalism can explore solutions if it contains real reporting about existing responses to problems and the results. But think tank journalism refers to journalism that proposes things that don't yet exist. Here's an example. Pieces that offer proposals to solve affirmative action. As per our discussion solutions, journalism discusses events that have already occurred. Not proposals. The Afterthought. This is a paragraph or sound bite at the end of a problem story that gives lip service to efforts at solving it.

[00:02:38] The solutions aren't considered with real seriousness, but rather thrown in as an afterthought. Here's an example the two-hour documentary, The House I Live In spends most of the running time exploring the problems in the American criminal justice system. At the end, the filmmaker hints at initiatives working to combat it, but not in a serious way. The instant activists a lot of people think when seeing the phrase solutions journalism that we're promoting pieces that ask the reader to click a button at the end and give a \$5 donation. We're not. We recognize the importance of highlighting issues, raising money. But that's not the goal of solutions journalism as we define it. We're trying to encourage journalists to tell the whole story so as to more faithfully represent society. Here's an example. This is something you'll often see on websites like Change.org. They offer an emotional plea and then ask for support for a specific cause as a means to solve the issue. Crispy Bacon. This kind of journalism is heartwarming, quirky, and a one off. It often appears at the end of the evening news or on Thanksgiving in the form of a kid with a lemonade stand. It tells the viewers that the world has good people doing cute things but doesn't really get into the structural issues that we want solutions journalism to address. Here's an example. A guy who made a wheelchair for his beloved pig. Adorable. Absolutely. Solutions. Journalism. Absolutely not. Hero worship. These are stories that celebrate or glorify an individual, often at the expense of explaining the idea that the individual exemplifies. Instead of talking about the merits of an approach an individual is advancing, the piece will gush about the person's decision to leave a high paying job to save the world.

[00:04:38] Solutions oriented stories have characters, but the stories are centered more on the work that they do. Let's dive into this issue a little bit more. There's a difference between heroes and hero worship. The titles of all of these stories might give the impression that they are about the heroes, but the stories themselves do not focus at length on an individual. For example, in Meet a New breed of Prosecutor, the author

begins the story with Texas prosecutor Mark Gonzales. But then segways into the history of. Prosecutors in the United States. It speaks about current and past trends and provides examples of other young liberal prosecutors like Gonzales and the impact that they are making. The story begins with the focus of an individual, but serves the broader need to illustrate a response in the man who can map chemicals all over your body. The author describes Peter Dawn since life, hobbies, and even his personality. Peter has the unusual combination of creativity and drive along with an incredible ability to finish projects. However, all of these traits and descriptions help the reader understand Dawn Stein's motivations in relation to the solution. They are in some way connected with the response. This is also the case, and he survived Ebola. Now he's fighting to keep it from spreading. The author of this article also provides a lengthy description of the hero, his back story and his experience contracting Ebola. If this story solely focusses on the doctor, it could fall into a hero worship story instead. The author also spends time describing the social conditions of Guinea, the challenges doctors face, and the details of how this particular doctor is training other medical professionals how to safely combat the spread of Ebola. By doing so, the hero story does not overshadow the core whodunnit narrative.

[00:06:40] It becomes central in understanding the issue and how it's being addressed. All of these stories have a common thread. Heroes. But they share something even more important. Solutions. Solutions. Journalism need not be feared. To the contrary, it's an important underused tool in a reporter's pocket. The old thinking, we might compromise our professionalism by covering solutions. The new thinking. We compromise our professionalism by not covering solutions. So, I know a lot to take in. But I hope this walkthrough of what solutions journalism isn't was helpful. I look forward to hearing in the forums about what you think about solutions, journalism and how it can improve journalism. Along with questions, comments, and even or especially disagreements. Thank you and I'll see you in the forum.