

Media

The Miami Herald's hypocrisy on journalistic ethics

By Jed Shlackman

Online Journal Contributing Writer

August 3, 2005—The [Miami Herald](#) has garnered national attention over events last week surrounding the death by the apparent self-inflicted gunshot wounds of local politician Arthur Teele, Jr.

Teele was a prominent community figure for decades who had served as a county commissioner and had lost a run-off race for county mayor prior to recent legal woes and allegations of corruption, illicit drug use, and seedy sexual behaviors. Teele was also an African-American Republican in a city known for its growing Cuban population.

Miami Herald columnist Jim DeFede had come to be someone Teele confided in, and in a fateful turn of events DeFede secretly recorded a phone conversation with Teele just before Teele's death. DeFede openly informed his bosses at the Herald of his actions and was shortly thereafter fired from the newspaper. This has created a controversy in which many have defended DeFede.

In Florida, state law forbids recording conversations without consent in most instances. While the legal status of this matter is being debated, I would like to focus on the newspaper's justification for their decision, as reported in Herald articles by staff writers Christina Hoag and Jay Weaver. In a July 29 article, Hoag reported:

Herald executives on Thursday defended their decision to fire columnist Jim DeFede, saying that he not only likely broke the law by taping a source without his consent but also violated the newspaper's ethical standards.

"What Jim did was not in keeping with the ethics of our profession. Added to that, it was probably illegal," Publisher Jesús Díaz Jr. told a room packed with stunned and dismayed newsroom staff members. "We have to hold ourselves to a higher standard."

"He had broken a basic tenet of The Miami Herald," Executive Editor Tom Fiedler said. "We abide by the law. We, as journalists, operate in a world where we hold people to high standards and ourselves to higher standards."

In a July 28 article, Weaver reported:

Díaz said that the Herald had no choice but to dismiss DeFede because his conduct was potentially a felony crime and unethical.

"With all of our sources, we have to treat them with respect and dignity," Díaz said. "I don't think we did that in this situation."

"The public's trust is at stake as a result of Jim's actions," Díaz said. "We have to make sure that the public understands that trust is the most important value that the community bestows upon us."

Fiedler, who was in San Jose, Calif., at the Herald's parent company, Knight Ridder, said the decision to fire DeFede was difficult.

"Jim has been a strong and valued voice at The Miami Herald and his departure will leave a significant void," Fiedler said in a statement. "I am personally heartsick about this. But we must hold ourselves to the highest standard of integrity if we are to maintain the trust of our readers and those with whom we deal."

Now, I find all this talk about high standards, trust, and integrity almost amusing. Groundbreaking information often comes out precisely when someone expresses himself without knowing it will be on the record, so to speak. Readers consult news sources to find accurate information, not just to have a record of what people in public positions want people to hear. Getting accurate information often means investigating thoroughly and even gaining evidence or information surreptitiously. The Herald has reported news items in the past where someone made embarrassing statements that he or she wasn't aware were being recorded. So apparently that's not a problem unless the paper's own reporter does the secret recording and creates a legal issue for the corporate owners of the media outlet.

The Herald's journalistic integrity would be something that they could be trying to protect if there were really much to protect. The Miami Herald routinely refuses to address stories that would present genuine investigative journalism and truthful news to the public. The succession of inside job terror incidents epitomized by the events of [September 11, 2001](#) have never been honestly reported on by the Miami Herald, although I give the Herald credit for once printing a paid advertisement by Michael Ruppert's *From The Wilderness* concerning matters related to the terror attacks. I wonder if the publishers at the Miami Herald recall a time when journalists focused on investigating stories rather than eating up and regurgitating propaganda that has been prepared for them.

Apparently, if you secretly record the comments of a man and never even use them in a story it's much more disturbing to the Herald than if you unquestioningly report as newsworthy fact what politicians state on the record. That includes when the politicians' comments are transparent propaganda to support an agenda that leads to deaths of at least tens of thousands of people.

When irrefutable evidence of high level crimes and deception is presented to mainstream media publications they pretend it doesn't exist. After all, the media itself is controlled by those involved in the crimes and deceptions. So The Miami Herald displays open hypocrisy to justify its decision to fire a popular reporter. If I were firing DeFede myself, it would be for his failure in the last four years to discuss the likelihood that the U.S. government was involved in orchestrating September 11, making many other debates about partisan politics pointless. But then for all I know Jim DeFede did wish to write about that and was silenced by his editors.

Jed Shlackman is a mental health counselor, hypnotherapist, and holistic healing practitioner in Miami, Florida. Jed also researches a variety of subjects related to our human existence and to ideas concerning spirituality and metaphysics. Jed can be contacted at jshlackman@adelphia.net and through his website at www.phinsights.com.