

**THE BLOG**

# MSM Voluntary Code of Conduct and Badges of Approval

By Marty Kaplan

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A front page [New York Times story](#) tells us that some boldface names in the blogosphere are talking about

*“creating several sets of guidelines for conduct and seals of approval represented by logos. For example, anonymous writing might be acceptable in one set; in another, it would be discouraged. Under a third set of guidelines, bloggers would pledge to get a second source for any gossip or breaking news they write about. Bloggers could then pick a set of principles and post the corresponding badge on their page, to indicate to readers what kind of behavior and dialogue they will engage in and tolerate. The whole system would be voluntary, relying on the community to police itself.”*

Makes you wonder what it would be like if the mainstream media voluntarily agreed to its own set of principles, accompanied by corresponding badges of approval.

**HE SAID/SHE SAID:** Story contains pairs of contradictory quotes with no indication of which side is factual and which side is gaming the system via disinformation.

**DRUDGE MATCH:** Story assigned because a GOP talking point planted in Drudge convinced an editor or producer that it had to be covered.

**LIES ‘R’ NOT US:** No matter what outrageous falsehoods were uttered by a source in this story, the words “lie” or “liar” do not appear.

**FRAME GAME:** Story uses terms like “slow bleed strategy,” “nuclear option,” “death tax,” “pro-life” etc. as though they were neutral descriptors rather than GOP coinages.

**[SIC] JOKE:** Front groups like “Citizens Against Lawsuit Abuse,” “Swift Boat Veterans for Truth,” “Americans for Sensible Estate Tax Solutions,” “Alliance for Better Medicare,” “The Advancement of Sound Science Coalition,” etc. are cited in this story without the use of [sic] after their names.

**FAKE THINK TANK:** Story quotes the Heritage Foundation, the American Enterprise Institute, the Progress and Freedom Foundation and other corporate-sponsored GOP meme factories as if they were legitimate scholarly research centers.

**FALSE EQUIVALENCE:** Story “balances” an inflammatory Heritage Foundation press release with a dull Brookings Institution report, as though a centrist scholarly analysis were the leftist equivalent of a radical right-wing screed. On a talk show, Orrin Hatch is “balanced” by Joe Lieberman.

**ACCESS ALL AREAS:** Story grants anonymity to an official source whose purpose is to defame a political opponent or selectively leak misleading classified information.

**SOME SAY:** Attempts by operatives and apparachiks to plant defamatory stories are laundered as routine reporting on inside buzz, Beltway rumors and Georgetown dinner party anecdotes.

**THAT’S OLD NEWS:** Previous inadequate reporting is used as a justification not to revisit an important story when significant new information surfaces.

**THAT’S ENTERTAINMENT:** A high-stakes moral battle in the public sphere is covered as if it were a theatrical performance with no consequences for ordinary people and no stakes for American democracy.

**EYE CANDY ALERT:** Because news is now a profit center in corporate conglomerates, this story about Anna Nicole Smith [Sanjaya, the Runaway Bride, etc.] is taking up valuable news-hole real estate that might otherwise be devoted to covering the occupation of the United States by an army of religious zealots and incompetent ideologues determined to destroy confidence in government, eradicate civil liberties, squelch dissent, transfer wealth from the middle to the top, establish an oil empire in the Middle East, and amuse the American population to death.

That’s a dozen, just to get the conversation going. Take it away, commenters.

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