

16 July 1999

Dear Michael,

I'm sure you are as overwhelmed as I regarding the staffing problems, particularly when we both should be concentrating on far more critical issues right now. I am having a hard time concentrating on what I should be right now, as I fear that things could get even worse than they are now if the right action is not taken with Beth and Sarah.

In case I was not perfectly clear in our last three meetings, I feel strongly that Beth needs to leave immediately, either on her own volition, or by being terminated. Please consider the following issues before talking to Beth and Sarah:

1. Beth lacks motivation, depth of understanding of the topics on which she writes, and simply does not work nearly as hard, or responsibly, as people who are earning less than half of her salary. [At this morning's editorial meeting, she had one 800-word story done, one held over from last issue, and was not sure what you wanted her to write on Tony Kevin, full stop.] The striking contrast between Phelim at a few months at the Post, and Beth at two years is one to be noted.

She adds nothing to the general atmosphere, notably, support to her colleagues in the office. In addition, I have heard unsolicited comments from people whose opinions I respect, about her lack of understanding during interviews.

From a cost/benefit point of view, she provides little (in quantity and quality), at a high cost.

2. It seems less necessary to discuss Sarah's contributions to the paper, as you appear to be skeptical already. Sarah is a reporter and will be noted such on the masthead, or I would like to be given a satisfactory explanation as to why she deserves a title which she does not earn. If it is decided to keep her on, the possibility of a holiday in August is out of the question at this point, particularly with Peter gone.
3. At the risk of stating the obvious, I believe that Peter left because the things he expected to take place this week did not, with no explanation as to why they did not. Despite Peter's shortcomings, he was in many ways an asset to the paper, and held respect of some staff with whom I am concerned. Phelim and Saroeun (as will be Cheath) are clearly upset at what has happened. Furthermore, it will be

perceived that we made a choice between Beth and Peter, and Beth won out. That's not the message I want to send to Phelim, Saroeun and Cheath. I think it is unfair to them, and we run the risk of losing at least one of them, and that would be the wrong loss for us right now.

4. I understand from sources known to embellishing facts, but sympathetic to the Post, that Beth — at least on one recent occasion at the FCC — was quite publicly announcing that the Post is sensational and shit. We neither need this spread around town by our own staff, nor need to have working for us someone who finds the FCC as a forum for venting frustration which she can not bring up with the management in a more appropriate fashion.
5. I have been delicately managing financial issues intensively for two years. The problem is familiar to me, is degenerating to a terminal point, and needs to be taken seriously. In addition there are things, like distribution — which never get to the tops of our lists of things to do — which are becoming critical. You and I need to concentrate our efforts BOTH on keeping things running AND on financial solutions — including cutting unnecessary costs like non-performing staff — and need to stop wasting time playing kindergarten games with children.
6. There's no easy way out of this one. We will be very lucky to keep this together, and can only do so if we can generate an atmosphere where everyone — from you and I, to the journos — are working together, rather than against each other. I know your attitude, energy and patience level is at least as bad as mine is. We need to get this thing on the right track before you go, and you need to decompress while you're gone.

If it is not your intention to resolve the problem with Beth immediately, think about how you are going to get the paper out, as I have no intention of working with Beth. If you want to discuss any of this before meeting Beth and Sarah, let me know. Let me know what is the result of the meeting as soon as possible.

K