***Theme:* Everyday activities of the press office**

***Goal:*** analyze the main daily responsibilities of the press service: meetings, press clipping and news monitoring, phone calls

***Control questions:***

1. Describe which meetings are the responsibility of the members of the press service.

2. Whose job is it to monitor news? And how?

3. Why after-hours phone number is especially important in countries with several time zones?

***Recommended literature:*** for a better understanding of the topic, please read the article: “Job description: press officer”. It is available in electronic version: <https://www.prweek.com/article/1461583/job-description-press-officer>

**Meetings:** Frequent meetings may sometimes seem to fill a day, leaving time for little else, but they can be essential to a smoothly operating system. Their goals are the sharing of information, anticipation of news, and the preparation to handle it. Regular meetings between a spokesperson and government colleagues who are not in press relations, and between the spokesperson and the government press staff, usually occur daily, often several times a day. Many federal offices begin their days with early morning meetings of senior staff, including the spokesperson. Typically the meetings last about 30 to 45 minutes, with the senior staff member talking about the principal concerns of the day – the government official's top issues, schedule, and meetings, for example.

Each staff member might then briefly discus upcoming issues, such as legislation, press interviews, budget questions, and newsworthy topics.

The press secretary should provide information about press coverage that morning, what breaking news might affect the government official, and the message of the day, week, or month.

Following this meeting, the spokesperson typically holds a second meeting with the press relations staff to debrief them on the critical issues of the day. This meeting follows the format of the senior staff meeting, with each member of the press staff commenting about what they are working on, reviewing the government official's schedule, and discussing media messages and topics that might be raised by reporters that day.

The press secretary makes assignments, and the staff delegates questions to various cabinet offices for response. During the day, the staff may make up a briefing or issues book with government policies or positions on current, important topics.

The press spokesperson can refer to this while preparing for a daily press briefing. At the White House, the press secretary usually includes the press officials to the first lady and the vice president in press staff meetings. Additionally, the press secretary or deputy press secretary has a daily phone call with his or her counterparts in the Departments of State and Defense and the Office of National Security Affairs to formulate a single message on foreign affairs issues.

Top officials may have a weekly meeting to discuss politics and planning and how they relate to communications. The group looks at how event opportunities could be used to reinforce the president's agenda.

Large departments with many regional offices and many bureaus under them do the same thing. The press offices of many state governors are similar.

Many press spokespersons to governors also routinely have meetings with the press secretaries for the various state departments and agencies.

**Press clipping and news monitoring:** Government press offices usually do some kind of daily - and often twice a day – press clipping or news monitoring to inform their bosses and staff about happenings that could have an impact on their operations.

The press offices of most governors and agencies include staff who read, clip, duplicate, and circulate news stories to top officials, and might also prepare a compilation of television stories. Typically, the clippings are a composite of the most important stories – good and bad – followed by less important ones. Other press offices also subscribe to clipping services, which are private companies that track articles, often in smaller or regional publications.

In putting together a daily clipping or press monitor package, the first priority of the press spokesperson's office usually is tracking the news rather than summarizing it. Often, making copies of the most important articles – positive and negative – is enough. Rewriting a news article, no matter how brief, can consume much staff time. In one new government, the most senior staff in a press office daily clipped, pasted, and summarized articles from newspapers and magazines for the dozen top senior staff. Although 80 percent of the news came from television, there was no monitoring of TV as it was felt to be too expensive. The staff also compiled a monthly summary of news coverage.

**Phone calls:** The press offices and the top-level departments have a duty officer system so that a press officer is available most hours, including evenings and weekends, to answer questions from the media. A duty officer system enables press offices to operate in the 24-hour-a-day news cycle; because it is often staffed by junior press officials, the main press secretary gets a break. Sometimes, when they are working on a big story, spokespersons give their cell or home phone numbers to the media – often getting the media representative's number in exchange – so questions can be answered after hours.

If a press official has been working with a reporter on a story, this would preclude bringing in a new spokesperson who may be less knowledgeable about the subject.

Exchanging after-hours phone numbers or having a staff person on call after work hours is especially important in countries with several time zones. In some emerging democracies, government spokespersons contend that giving out their cell phone numbers means being accessible to the press, but this is not necessarily true. Having reporters call you on your cell phone eliminates the "filter" of a secretary or aide answering the phone, finding out who is calling, and determining the subject of the call. And it puts the spokesperson at the mercy of the press when he or she might not be prepared.

Having an aide screen the call allows the press officer to be prepared. Also, having an aide answer the initial call means that someone is always able to take the media's questions, and it allows the spokesperson to answer the most important call first and be ready with an informed response when doing so.

 It is essential, however, that a spokesperson call back a reporter promptly. And it is important that a spokesperson keep the cell phone switched on. Otherwise, the press will go elsewhere for information.

In one European state, the press secretary to a foreign minister was not aware that Yugoslavia's Slobodan Milosevic had been charged with war crimes by the International War Crimes Tribunal at The Hague when a reporter called him directly on his cell phone requesting a statement. Because the press secretary did not know about the war crimes charges, "I appeared totally stupid," he admitted later. "You don't have to answer a question immediately," says Joni Inman of the National Association of Government Communicators. "You have a right not to be ambushed. It is better to get back to a reporter than to misspeak." Adds Sheila Tate, former spokesperson for First Lady Nancy Reagan, "You can say 'you caught me at a bad time. What is your deadline? Let me get back to you.' "