



SEARCHLIGHTS AND SUNGLASSES

# LEARNING LAYER

## ‘Pay no attention to the man behind the curtain’

The above quote from the “Wizard of Oz,” [says journalism engagement advocate Joy Mayer](#), helps characterize the way many news people see their profession. They are the great and powerful wizards and audiences should appreciate that.

But without knowing what’s behind the curtain, communities can easily distrust journalism.

### Engagement activities on three levels:

**Flashlight:** Is your school media really serving the needs and interests of the students in your school? Conduct a readership survey or a focus group with random students to find out. Be sure the students you speak with are as diverse as the student body.. What’s most important to your readers? What would they like to see? Brainstorm a list of questions, before conducting the survey/focus group. Post the results on a school or local news organization’s website.

**Spotlight:** Mayer writes that there are three sorts of engagement: outreach, conversation and collaboration. Read her [blog post](#) describing these strategies. Choose a local news outlet, such as a campus or local newspaper, and evaluate how they are/are not using these tools. What could they do to better improve community engagement?

**Searchlight:** Mayer says [news organizations can learn from the business world](#), because successful non-media organizations see engagement as a mindset more than simply a set of activities. Each student could find a non-media company that has a strong engagement presence, especially on social media. Conduct an interview with a representative digitally, on [Skype](#), [Google Hangouts](#), [Livestream](#), etc. Report to the class on the results. Describe how the business engages customers. What could the news media learn from it?

**Bonus for student news media advisers:** Mayer says engagement must be baked “into the DNA” of an organization. What can you or your students do to make engagement a permanent part of how you think about journalism? Consider asking other experts at your school to research your engagement

efforts, using the “living lab” of student media.