

be in court, she cautions. A recent case was lost when the defendant was reported to have said, "We just about have that bastard."

Best defense against libel is often that the plaintiff is a public figure. Federal courts and those in 19 states now define a public figure as anyone who has sovereign power, i.e. rule-making power which affects the public.

Public relations law is difficult & important because it merges two kinds of legal thinking: traditional communications law and liability portions of commercial law. Huttenstine told Southern PR Federation's annual conference that unusual care must be taken, going so far as to recommend not setting up interviews for anyone with the media. Instead, have reporters call interviewees to formalize details and get direct consent. "Otherwise, you can be drawn into a suit."

Asked whether such litigiousness may fade soon, she said there is little evidence it will.

ITEMS OF INTEREST FOR PRACTITIONERS

¶New study shows pollution regulations actually saved estimated \$21 billion in '78. According to President's Council on Environmental Quality, eliminating pollution controls would be "penny wise and pound foolish." Savings figure overwhelms estimated \$16 million cost of compliance. Research was done by Bowdoin College economist A. Myrick Freeman, who attributes savings to health improvements, reduced damage to vegetation & other damage reduction. For copy of WSJ article write pr.

¶Avidly read alumni publications are often-ignored vehicles that reach attractive "elite" audiences. College Alumni Publications, by Richard Weiner & James Colasurdo, both of Richard Weiner (NYC) is first-of-its-kind reference book. 190-pg. hard-cover lists publications by state; includes circulation, format & rate information. 32-page section describes & evaluates readership & format of selected magazines, including Ivy League & other high-circulation & prestige publications. (\$20 from Public Relations Publishing Company, 888 7th Ave., NYC 10106.)

HUMORING PUBLIC RELATIONS...

¶"I couldn't help but laugh at your boxed story, page 1 of July 21, 1980 reporter on 'DBMP-BMA.' A similar 'alphabet soup' slogan was used by our Corporate Training Dep't: 'DBMP-BMS: Don't Bring Me Problems - Bring Me Solutions.' However, when the Corporate Trainer wrote this on the chalkboard and asked the assembled branch managers what it meant, one of our guys responded: 'Don't Bother Me, Bother My Secretary!'

"In the case of 'DBMP-BMA,' I offer: 'Don't Bother Me, Please Bother My Assistant.'"

-- Dave Bennett, pub rels ofcr, Marine Midland Bank (Elmira, NY)

¶People who aren't in the field tend to confuse advertising and publicity. In a speech to Peninsula Women in Advertising (Calif.), Marlane McGarry, vp of Simon/Public Relations, explained that "advertising is something you pay for; publicity is something you pray for."

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MODEL PARTNERSHIP FOR 80s: BUSINESS TEAMS UP WITH HOSPITALS, TREATS COST CONTAINMENT AS SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY ISSUE; HOSPITALS SEE SELVES AS "VICTIMS" SO NEED OUTSIDE VIEW

Besieged by rising costs for employees -- & no significant gains -- business is stepping into healthcare crisis. Some corporations are hiring administrators to trim expenditures. Illinois Bell has novel approach: viewing cost control as social responsibility issue.

Illinois' second largest employer spends \$1 billion a year in health benefits. It would be irresponsible "if a company which pays such a huge healthcare bill took no initiative in trying to control costs," ass't vp Betsy Ann Plank told pr reporter. This is "particularly important in a regulated utility where all costs are eventually borne by the customer."

Company's urban afrs dep't surveyed healthcare officials to identify inflation factors & solutions. Study found most agreed both voluntary & gov't-enforced efforts have been unsuccessful in controlling costs. Also identified possible attitudinal barrier -- "Administrators regard their hospitals as victims, and not so much as the cause, of inflation," Plank says. "It leads us to conclude that while they seem to have a thorough understanding of the economy of their industry, most fail to have a broader view of the economy."

Who can introduce that perspective? Illinois Bell found 10 employees already sat on hospital boards. Most functioned as mere "captives to fund raising." So company held all-day seminar to get board members to focus on understanding the cost situation. Input came from "whole coterie of people," including outsiders. Other cos. have since shown interest & Bell is offering them assistance in creating their own programs.

New Partnership Proposed

Simultaneously, Plank has approached hospital community with idea for partnership that goes beyond the "hat in hand syndrome." "We need to mount joint education programs, to do more joint research, to create alliances to communicate with other members of the healthcare community, and the public at large," she told members of Illinois Hospital Public Relations Society.

BUSINESS AS CONSUMER

Traditionally, work in the healthcare field has been seen as the province of healthcare experts. Hospitals train their board members, health agencies work with their volunteers & so on. But no one, to the best of my knowledge, ever said a third party ought to be interested. We are not a disinterested third party -- we pay the cost of healthcare.

-- Betsy Ann Plank

IAN WILSON LEAVES GE FOR NEW STRATEGIC ENVIRONMENT CENTER; ADMITTING ERRORS HELPS IN FACING FUTURE

tional (Menlo Park, Calif.) -- a non-profit problem-solving organization. Communications will play a vital role, because much will hinge on "human nature" variables.

New "Strategic Environment Center" aims to help organizations "utilize futures information in designing planning systems." Ian Wilson, well known public policy advisor at GE, will be senior policy analyst. "Most organizations find it extremely difficult to deal with uncertainty.

They tend to perform most effectively when they know what the rules of the game are. But the rules are being altered suddenly, arbitrarily, unpredictably, and even retroactively."

Changes in relationships within and without the organization are essential in preparing for the future. Process has to be "error-embracing" rather than "error-denying," Wilson told prr. "An organization has to recognize it's going to make mistakes and it had better try to learn from them. This requires some shift in the corporate culture because of the very strong tendency in any hierarchical organization to cover up -- to hoard rather than share."

SRI's futurists cite seven driving forces responsible for volatile societal environment: 1) rapidly changing personal values, 2) growing power of special interest groups, 3) increasing international competition, 4) need to restructure US industry, 4) growing interdependence between business & gov't, 6) increased gov't regulation, and 7) resulting constraints on ability of corporations to react rapidly & flexibly.

Other heavy hitters in new Center are Willis Harman (see prr 11/20/78), Don Michael (U. of Mich. expert in utilizing scientific knowledge) & Peter Schwartz (cybernetic systems specialist).

PRACTITIONERS FACE CRIMINAL CHARGES, WARNS LAW RESEARCHER; WATCH OFFHAND TALK

In her teaching & research at U. of Ala. she sees "violations all over the place." Libelous statements are safe only if 1) they are newsworthy, 2) are in the public interest, and 3) are made without malice, i.e. deliberately intending to harm the person or organization spoken about.

Don't tell your secretary "we're going to nail 'em with this." Or confide to colleagues that "we've just about got 'em." Tho usually not meant to be taken literally, it may

Organizational "culture" faces vast changes if it is to cope with increasingly complex & uncertain external environment, say futurists at SRI International.

PROGRAMS TO HELP FACE THE FUTURE

1. Future Programs -- developing understanding of how world is changing.
2. VALS (Values & Lifestyles Program) -- studies & interprets how consumers are changing.
3. SCAN -- early warning system to identify faint signals of new developments on business horizon.
4. New Competencies -- to help organizations become more receptive & responsive.
5. RAMP (Regulatory Analysis & Management Program) -- helps gov't agencies assess various regulatory approaches.

"Someday soon" a public relations practitioner will be found guilty of criminal liability in a libel, privacy or similar lawsuit, predicts Marian Huttenstine, consultant on comms law.

SOME ENGAGING REASONS WHY PRACTITIONERS QUESTION NEED FOR MYSTIQUE

Visualize a conversation between Hippocrates and an associate when medicine was in its infancy --

Associate: "We can't seem to make any headway in getting those lay crumbs to give us any recognition. Think we'll ever get to be a profession?"

Hippocrates: "I've been giving that some thought, Doctor. And, I think I've got the answer. We'll name all diseases and all cures and all medicines with terms that just we medicos can understand. The mystique of it all will fill them with awe and, presto, we'll be a profession!"

-- Dave Butler, asst mgr pub afrs, CN Rail (New Brunswick)

The use of jargon is rarely justified. Buzzwords confuse outsiders. What's more, they blunt our thinking and modes of expression.

For public relations to attain the "aura of authority" advocated by Mr. Felton, it must be judged by the actions and achievements of its practitioners.

-- Sue Glick, assoc dir pub rels, Benton & Bowles (NYC)

If we as communicators need a new vocabulary, we and the various publics we're communicating to are in deep trouble. If we are communicators first and Public Relations Directors, Advertising Managers, Editors, etc. second, simplicity in an honest straight-forward vocabulary is the best way to go.

-- Jack Heaps, sales promotion mgr Rexnord (Milwaukee)

! Next week PRSA President Pat Jackson argues in favor of a "mystique."

We will be considered professionals when we have the intelligence and ability to translate the ideas, writings, and acts of a variety of clients into language that the public can understand and use. The last thing that we as communicators need is another language or vocabulary.

-- Bradley Tufts, dir info svcs, Bucknell Univ. (Lewisburg, Penn)

Good grief, NO! The mark of the PR profession, and I happen to think it is a profession for many of us, is the fact that we are communicators. We eschew jargon as energetically as those other "professionals" embrace it.

-- Jean Anwyll, vp & gen mgr, McKinney/PR (Phila)

First of all, we do have a mystique -- nobody knows what we do. Second of all, we do have our own jargon -- ordinary language.

I hate to think there are some out there stealing language from journalists or business when they should be stealing it from the streets & the neighborhoods.

-- Gary Hunt, dir media rels, Ohio State Bar Assoc (Columbus)

I wholeheartedly concur with efforts to upgrade our professional status both within and without the corporate suite. I truly believe, however, that it will improve and grow strong only as we are able to help solve, through communications, some of the pressing problems. There are no shortcuts to success.

-- Jack Anderson, vp-pr svcs, Horton, Church & Goff (Providence, R.I.)