

joyable to people from a wide variety of backgrounds," says Patrick Hundley, chairman of the pr & adv'g session. Papers/presentations may cover public relations theory, history, technique, personalities, criticism or any subject related to pr's function in popular culture. Send proposals (with 150-wd abstracts &/or descriptions) by Nov. 1 to Hundley, dir of dev'l, Phillips Univ, Enid, Ok. 73702; 405/237-4433, ext. 339.

Financial counseling is newest & fastest growing employee benefit finds survey of personnel execs from Minnesota's 100 largest companies. Conducted by Balch & Watson (Mpls), survey also shows performance unit plans & incentive stock options remain among the most preferred exec benefits -- and expected by half the respondents. Many suggest bonuses be tied to company performance. Still considered a "standard" benefit is the company car. Club memberships, supplemental insurance & pensions were also mentioned.

National clearinghouse on productivity, QWL, organizational development initiatives & labor-mgmt relations is available thru a division of the US Labor Dept's Labor-Management Services Adm (LMSA). Division works with trade ass'ns, labor unions, regional resource centers such as state productivity & quality of worklife centers and area labor-mgmt committees. LMSA is gathering information from companies, unions & public agencies on their cooperative programs to be published as a directory. Also will provide info on current pub'ns, films & related materials on cooperative programs, local sources of technical assistance and a calendar of public conferences & seminars on the subject. (More info from Div of Cooperative Labor-Mgmt Prgms, LMSA, US Dep't of Labor, Wash DC 20216; 212/523-7408)

Blue-ribbon commission to study public relations graduate education in US has been formed. Undertaking the task is Ass'n for Education in Journalism's pr div in cooperation with PRSA & IABC. Commission's goals are 1) examine pr education at master's & doctoral levels in terms of educational standards & professional expectations; 2) design a model curriculum that will meet the profession's needs as well as bring about improvement of the practice. Co-chrm are Paul Alvarez (chrm, Ketchum Public Relations) and Michael Hesse (chrm, dep't of adv'g & pr, Univ of Alabama). 10 other mbrs represent education, business, PRSA & IABC. Commission's report is scheduled to be completed next summer.

The Book of Business Communications Checklists by John Bittleston & Barbara Shorter is a mind-jogger for applying rules of communication. Even if you know all the rules, you'll find these practical checklists useful. They free you from the worry of details to focus on the broader picture. Book is divided into 3 sections:

- 1) Individuals -- covers letter writing, speech giving, interviewing, negotiation;
- 2) Audiences -- includes pros & cons of various methods of communication to 11 different audiences and creates checklists demonstrating how to communicate 6 events (disaster, acquisition, divestment, layoffs, reorganization & good news development);
- 3) Communicating Away From The Office -- details moving, giving a party, planning a vacation. Book is written from authors' experiences resolving similar situations in their own careers. (From John Wiley & Sons, 605 3rd Ave, NYC 10158. \$29.95; 166 pgs.)

#### WHO'S WHO IN PUBLIC RELATIONS

PEOPLE. Low Riggs becomes dpr at Good Samaritan Medical Center (Phoenix)...

Paluszek & Leslie Assocs (NYC) promotes Lorraine Thelian to sr vp.

Vol.25 No.35  
September 6, 1982

## MEDIA CHEAP SHOTS ARE A PLOY TO GAIN AN ADVANTAGE, CREATE ENTERTAINMENT BUT LACK CREDIBILITY WITH PUBLIC; DO THEY DESERVE A RESPONSE?

Try to turn a media cheap shot into a plus, recommends Ted Hutchcroft, vp, Council for Agricultural Science & Technology (Ames, Iowa). He defines "cheap shot" as "a form of misinformation that is disseminated to gain an advantage for the source." It often contains the element of surprise, a ploy to catch the opponent off guard & unable to make a proper response.

So what should you do if you're the victim of a cheap shot? Hutchcroft explained his organization's guidelines at the Agricultural Relations Council's seminar:

1. Analyze & evaluate the cheap shot -- Who or what is the source? Is it a result of deliberate misinformation or inadequate information? Is it an error in editorial judgment or is the source a continual sniper? Has it come at what educators call a "teachable moment"? Is this the time or the issue on which to respond? Respond only if there is a prospect of a positive return.

2. Focus your response -- What is the audience for the response: the writer? editor? publisher? gov't agency? Congress? residents of a community? an industry? news media? Seldom will the general public be the primary audience.

3. Resolve its purpose -- Your response must serve a legitimate organizational goal. In addition, know who the other beneficiaries of your response may be: an individual? general public? scientific community? an industry?

4. Find the best communication channel -- Is the best channel for your response a letter to the editor? a personal telephone call or visit? an advertisement? a publication? a tv or radio appearance? combination of these?

5. Select best person(s) to make your response -- Avoid personality conflicts between cheap-shot source & responder. Responder should know the topic & be acceptable as a representative of the group for which he speaks. He need not have been involved in the original cheap shot as this is a matter of issues & facts, not personalities.

6. Respond promptly -- Answer cheap shot as soon after publication as possible. Reader retention is not very good so they may not remember the original incident. Also, a quick response tells the source that you're taking the matter very seriously.

"People respond to cheap shots in three ways: If the cheap shot agrees with their biases they may say 'right on!' or 'way to go!' If it goes against their biases, they react more violently, getting upset, wanting to get even. But usually they pay little attention except for the entertainment value involved. It's unlikely they'll even remember the incident and if they do they'll usually accept it as only a partial truth."



7. Stay within your area of expertise -- Just as politicians can look silly trying to call plays in a football game, so scientists & businesspeople lose credibility when speaking about topics outside their experience.

8. Distribute the response -- Be sure your primary target audiences each receive a copy of your response along with an explanation. If cheap shot appeared in the public media, send copies to the newspapers subscribing to the news wire or the syndicate. They deserve a copy of your corrections so they are aware of the level of credibility of the services they are buying. Send copies to your organization's members, clients, customers, voters, suppliers, colleagues.

And what if you don't respond? "If it will be quickly forgotten, forget about it and go on to other matters. But many times a response is demanded, if only to correct the public record. Once a statement is published it takes on a form of legitimacy, even if unfounded by facts. We have a responsibility to keep the public's supply of information as accurate as possible."

Of related interest: Do reporters still engage in cheap shots? George Watson, vp of ABC News, reported last week in a column for the Los Angeles Herald Examiner that they do -- at least in the public's view. A recent ABC poll on the conflict between press freedom & privacy found 62% of the respondents approving of a law to prevent tv reporters from asking questions of the people who didn't want to be interviewed. 50% think tv reporters' questions are more designed to offend people than to elicit news.

HOW TO OVERCOME TRUSTWORTHINESS PROBLEMS IN PUBLIC RELATIONS RESEARCH -- E.G. LYING; MEDIA CAN HELP BY EXPLAINING MARGIN OF ERROR

Accurate opinion polls are a questionable commodity. Practitioners often assume "margin of error" provides confidence to believe the fig-

ures. But does it? Researchers claim the public is lying to pollsters. It has generally been assumed there was no motivation to lie. But new studies find that social rewards & punishments are strong pressures even in anonymous interviews by unknown fieldworkers. Public Opinion magazine recently summarized the evidence and found lying a definite pitfall for research.

Respondents who lie, or guess, do so in the direction of more socially desirable opinions & behavior. Educated respondents are less likely to give false information because they are more likely to have opinions -- and the self confidence to stand by them. As topics recede from people's immediate personal concerns, however, the volume of opinion thins and the guess answers increase. Outright lying is strongest when the respondent's actual behavior or situation clashes with his or her beliefs. Non-whites, young & lower income groups are found to be most apt to "misreport."

Reducing inaccuracy. When lack of knowledge or education may be the cause for inaccuracy, phrase questions so respondents have an opportunity not to answer. Be sure to offer a "don't know" category. Or ask "Have you heard (or thought) enough about this to say?" Studies show when questions are asked without such "filters," the poorly educated or less knowledgeable are most likely to guess at an answer. The well educated want to report their true opinion, which is "don't know." Another technique is to include checking-questions that compare attitudinal with behavioral qualities.

Media Now Let Readers Judge Whether Polls Are Believable

Wire services now issue a sidebar with public opinion survey stories which gives sampling information in plain English. Readers can then measure the believability of the poll. Recent AP/NBC poll on abortion views states the statistics of the sample, then explains: "If one could have talked this past week to all Americans with telephones, there is only 1 chance in 20 that the findings would vary by more than 3 percentage points."

Articles on polls now are more careful not to make inferences about the results, but to state the actual questions. The abortion story cited above contains many phrases such as "This question was posed..." or "In response to the question..." John Shurr of AP told prr these techniques are used because "Some polls are less valuable than others. We include this material so readers can judge for themselves if they want to believe it or not." Media are not obligated to run the sidebar, however -- but it helps make editorial judgments easier.

PUTTING HUMAN VALUES FIRST HELPS IN CRISIS RESPONSE

Mansville clearly learned from others' misfortunes that it is important to show a caring attitude in crisis situations. When the company announced it was filing for bankruptcy to fend off thousands of damage suits for exposure to asbestos, executives were quoted as follows: "It is no pleasure for us in the longrun to win a suit against a person who is obviously disabled."

Critics may call this wordy or filled with too many qualifiers. But compare the tenor of response to the public in recent cases. In paraphrase, the word to the public after the Love Canal problem was "It's not our fault!" At Three Mile Island it was "Don't worry about it; it's no big deal." The outcome in those cases is history.

IDEA OF THE MONTH: HONOR EMPLOYEES WHERE PUBLIC CAN SEE

Internal recognition for a job well done is one thing --

but public acknowledgment is another. A parking sign at a shopping mall seen recently by the editors reads "Employee Of The Month."

Not only is this a perk for the persons winning the honor, it gives them special recognition in the community as well as among colleagues. It is truly a special honor rather than just lip service and a picture in the newsletter. Perhaps more importantly, it motivates the best people to relate feelings & information about the organization to members of the public with whom they come in contact.

ITEMS OF INTEREST TO PRACTITIONERS

"A "Call for Papers" is being issued for the 1983 meeting of the Popular Culture Ass'n to be held April 24-27 in Wichita, Kansas. "Traditionally a celebration of the unusual & the unusually mundane, this meeting promises to be informative & en-

UP TO DATE?

Are you still putting "cc" on your letters? Check your correspondence and see how many still use this designation. Before the days of photocopying, it meant a carbon copy had been sent to the person or persons listed. Today, with copiers in every office, only "c" is necessary. If you are a disbeliever, ask your secretary if she has any carbon paper.