

VELSICOL TAKES INITIATIVE
TO IMPROVE CHEMICAL INDUSTRY'S REPUTATION,
OFFERS COMMUNITY RELATIONS GUIDE

The chemical industry is making another attempt to strengthen its image. Effects of campaign begun when Jim Sites was vp-comms for

Chemical Manufacturers Ass'n (DC) have since eroded. New effort is needed because of recent set-backs: cozy relationship between industry representatives & officials of the federal EPA; EPA's accusation that Dow Chemical has recklessly polluted the waters around its Midland, Mich. base; widespread contamination of toxic dioxins in Times Beach, Mo.; \$1 billion in lawsuits filed against chemical companies in just 2 federal courts by people claiming they or their relatives were adversely affected by exposure to toxic substances; and the list continues.

"We can't do without chemicals, so we've got to figure out how to do a better job with them," says Randal Schumacher, dir of health & safety, CMA. Strategy will be to call attention to safety record, concern for public health & efforts in reducing hazardous waste. One problem industry faces is the public's perception.

Velsicol Chemical Corp has put together a 149-pg community relations guide. Titled "Primed & Committed," 3-ring notebook is specifically written for users of the company's products. But it's being offered as a community relations "recipe book" to practitioners for \$60. Sharing ideas with others & recouping some of the cost is a good idea. Public relations needs more sharing of ideas and with tight budgets, it makes sense.

Velsicol begins guide by admitting its previous negative image as "an uncaring corporate citizen and a beleaguered company." Change came when pres of parent company issued new charter: "Our first priority in the allocation of capital is not for expansion, but to make the plants & products environmentally secure & safe. This is the first priority and this priority for allocation of capital to Velsicol takes place before profit, before growth -- Velsicol must be made reasonably secure."

"Communicating with the public during good times and bad times is critical. That's why this guide was created," says the introduction. Public opinion plays a critical role. Industry's past failure to inform created a void that special interest groups were ready to fill. Deciding who the special interest groups are and how to deal with them is stressed. Potential allies & special interest groups are listed with facts about the org's.

Guide stresses getting to know the media. Establish your credibility and expertise. Includes samples of different materials used in a media relations program, along with a fully scripted 57-slide program. Case studies illustrate different tactics. (\$60 from them at 341 E. Ohio St, Chicago, 60611)

Following our custom, pr reporter will not be published next week. This is the last issue in 1983 -- which prompts a reminder to order your binder now. Only \$7, big enough to hold a year's issues including our 3 supplements.

DIED: L.L.L. Golden, 74, NY & Toronto counselor and author of the book, Only By Consent.

Ward B. Stevenson, 63, a PRSA past president (1963) and most recently a sr consultant for Hill & Knowlton.

Vol.26 No.50
December 19, 1983

CLOSE THE OFFICE . . . GET ON A BUS . . . AND LEAVE TOWN:
GOAL-PLANNING & PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT RETREATS
REV UP YOUR OPERATION, SAY THOSE WHO'VE TRIED THEM

Sometimes when contemplating a problem it helps to physically change your environment. "If you sit the same way & look at the same things all the time, you're thinking becomes regimented," Joe Adams, pres, The Adams Group (Rockville, Md.) told pr. On a larger scale, this rationale applies to organizational planning & employee retreats.

"If you go away and don't think about phones ringing & day-to-day kinds of worries, you think differently. You need to do your planning in a different environment than where the reality of implementing it is done. You can become trapped by your environment," Adams explains. For this reason, Adams Group holds a retreat every November where all employees are taken away from the office for a couple days of organizational planning, brainstorming & fun.

"I believe in management by objectives, particularly in a creative type environment. These people are self-motivated. But they need to know where the firm is going. So if we outline those goals, then they can make their personal goals to help the firm get there. It allows them to create their own opportunity. And it has helped us keep good people."

"Creativity is imaginative problem solving," explains Adams. "This can happen anywhere in the organization. So if we can get everybody to buy into that -- that everybody's job is imaginative problem solving -- then good things start happening. That's what we've been able to do with these retreats."

Most recent retreat was held at a Georgian mansion -- a continuing education facility of the UMD. Employees left at 8 AM Sunday and returned to the office Tuesday morning. Office was closed Monday with a part-time employee manning the phones. Firm's goals for the year were presented. Dep'ts then got together individually and mapped out their specific goals for the year to support the entire firm's.

After the retreat, individuals make up their individual goals to support both dep't & mgmt goals. "From an employee's perspective, it's probably one of the biggest motivational tools that we have during the year. It promotes a lot of communication on an informal basis among people we don't ordinarily deal with. It also assures that everyone is going in the right direction at the same time," ass't pr coordinator Marion Joyce told pr.

Padilla & Speer (Mpls) is another believer in the effectiveness of employee retreats. It has been holding them once or twice a year since 1970. Outside speakers



-- futurists, industrial psychologists, professionals & educators in pr -- are brought in to energize discussions about public relations. "We try to have some sort of theme to them each year. One year we launched a long-range planning process which took another 18 months to complete. We get together in the spring to talk about what it is we want to do when we hold the retreat in the fall," David Speer, pres, told prr.

Unlike Adams Group, Padilla & Speer does not include support staff each year. "When we do, it's to let them know something about the purpose of the firm and why things happen. So often they only see a segment of the activity without any particular understanding of what it is we're doing for a living." These meetings are held about every 3 years.

Retreat begins on Friday afternoon and runs thru Sunday. New attendees are given a work shirt with their name inscribed, or company hats & t-shirts and some form of "walk-around money" that might come in a penny bank or coin changer. "We try to have fun with it. The idea is to take the pomp & circumstance out of the meeting. And to make everyone feel equal so the older more experienced people don't intimidate the new younger members and quell any creative thoughts they might have."

One key advantage of this planning tool is that everyone participates. "You get a sign-off. Goals are not being imposed by committee without explanation. When we arrive at a decision, everyone knows what the issues are and how the decision was reached. It also gives people an opportunity for reflection -- to see if they want to be with our organization and its goals & objectives."

Logic behind a planning retreat applies to dep'ts as well as firms. Public relations dep'ts, large & small, within all kinds of organizations can use the same technique. Begin by having the CEO share mgmt's goals with the group. Beyond that, all of the same strategies & benefits apply.

PRESIDENT'S DRUG AWARENESS PROGRAM USES PSYCHOLOGICAL MESSAGE STRATEGY TO REACH YOUNG AUDIENCE

Aimed at 4th, 5th & 6th graders, the message vehicle is comic books. Peer pressure -- a critical motivational factor for this age group -- is used to enforce the message.

DC Comics' "best selling, most popular" characters, the Teen Titans, are the stories' heroes. These 7 teenage super heroes have been exciting young readers since 1980. One new character, The Protector, has been created for this program. He's a troubled teenager who trys to make up for his past by dedicating his life to helping people everywhere.

Intent is that these super heroes will become positive role models for the readers. "So much of the information & pressure to use drugs comes from older kids," Karin Lippert, dpr, DC Comics (NYC) told prr. It's important that older kids also convey the message not to use drugs. The action/adventure stories draw the kids in and tell the full force of the dangers of drugs -- powerfully but without exaggeration.

Opportunity for sponsorship: Comic books have been sponsored by Keebler, National Soft Drink Ass'n & IBM. Over a million have been distributed for each grade along with a teacher's guide, classroom poster & a certificate for participating students. "That doesn't quite cover the entire student population per grade but we hope to accomplish that with additional sponsors."

Not only does the message say drugs are dangerous, but it gives kids alternatives to try to deal with their drug problems: 1) say no to peer pressure, 2) communicate with parents & adults in their lives about drug problems they may have, 3) reach out to centers & support networks for help.

Is it working? Lippert reports lots of enthusiasm for the program. Professionals, such as policemen who go around to schools talking about drug problems, and other mental health & state health officials have asked for copies of the comic books. Over a million requests have come in from outside the school system. "In a few years we intend to measure this age group's level of awareness of the dangers of drugs and the level to which use has decreased. We hope to be able to demonstrate that it's working."

OFFERING INVESTMENT IN OWNERSHIP IS ULTIMATE IN PUBLIC PARTICIPATION; CLEVELAND UTILITY SELLS SHARES TO CUSTOMERS

Want to increase stakeholder participation in your organization or turn potential adversaries into advocates? Offer them an investment

opportunity in your organization. Cleveland Electric Illuminating Company gave its customers a chance to buy some CEI common stock. In just 2 months, 17,000 customers bought 729,000 shares, raising \$13.7 million for the company. "The response really astounded us. It wasn't really a money-raising effort. We approached it from the point of view that people who owned company stock would be more receptive to the company's message on nuclear power construction, rates, or whatever," explains chrm Robert Ginn.

Other utilities have also sold stock to customers. Two pioneers were Montana Power Company and Virginia Electric & Power Company. Ten others have also gone this route, but CEI is by far the most successful.

Another method is ESOP (Employee Stock Ownership Plan). This provides individual employees with the opportunity to own a stake in the organization. One of the principle reasons for the popularity of ESOP is the notion that when workers become owners and it makes a financial difference to them how their organization does, then they'll take a more active interest in the health of their company. A survey of companies with ESOPs shows 55% claim motivation & productivity of employee-owners were somewhat improved and 15% were strongly improved.

"The value of ESOP is that it can lead to a more synergistic (win-win) framework where the energy, ingenuity & self-interest of each person becomes merged with that of everyone else," explains Norman Kurland, a DC-based pioneer of ESOP. (For more info, write ESOP Ass'n, 1725 DeSales St. NW, Wash DC 20036; 202/293-2971)

Allied Plywood has an ESOP working. Not only were tax incentives appealing to owners Ed & Phyllis Sanders, but they found new work incentives for employees. Today, an Allied truck driver averaging \$8,000 in base wages makes 3 times that in cash & stock bonuses, all from ownership profits. The company contributes pre-tax money to the ESOP to keep it going. The truck driver contributes nothing from his paycheck or pocket. "Although I can't measure it precisely, I know the motivation is there among our employees. I can see it in the way they treat customers, and in how they make deliveries. There's no question that our level of productivity is up," says Sanders.