

SEC officials say, "It is not the job of the SEC to set policy. We only carry it out. It is Congress' responsibility to change it." But the 1st Amendment states, "Congress shall make no law . . ."

Retired Chief Justice Warren Berger told conferees that the Declaration of Independence was the promise, the Constitution, the fulfillment. Now chrmn, Commission on the Bicentennial of the Constitution, he said except for America "there is no place in the world for free speech, free press & freedom of religion."

2. Judicial Process Atty Betty Murphy, respected expert on the First Amendment, cited how under the judicial process, any and all internal documents can be seen by opposing counsel. These can then be leaked -- and damage the organization's image even when it eventually wins the case.

Bill Adams of Phillips Oil concurs: "Don't write anything down during merger negotiations. They will take anything and read something into it. Don't even take a newspaper clipping and write 'that jerk' in the corner."

3. Libel "There is a tug going on between tort law, libel & the First Amendment," Murphy notes. While publicized cases often involve suits against news media, 2/3rds of libel actions are not against media. When public figures sue media, 75 of 100 cases never get to court. But of 25 cases that do, media loses 20 or 80%. However, this leaves 75 public figures frustrated & feeling their reputations have been harmed by media.

USEFUL ITEMS FROM THE CONFERENCE

¶Creativity & distinctiveness of your annual report cover can mean the difference between a report that's read and one that's tossed. Speaking on new trends in annual reports, Demaris K. Hetrick (Harsco Corp.) emphasized using cover design to make a statement. "Grab the reader. Tell the essentials of your organization on the cover." A major marketing piece, as well as a financial relations one, the AR should stick to fundamentals, Hetrick recommends: 1) explain organization in 1 paragraph or less, 2) include a mission statement, 3) use 3-year comparisons, 4) avoid jargon, 5) discuss shareholder programs, 6) explain with graphs and charts, 7) give contact names and phone numbers.

¶Video News Releases are expensive -- averaging \$20,000 for a 90-min. tape. So careful planning of production and distribution is wise. Alvin Roselin of Planned Communications Services reported on their survey of television news directors, which resulted in the following suggestions: 1) preferred format is 90-sec., 3/4 inch video cassette; 2) use off-camera reporter; 3) don't include subtitles on the tape; 4) provide extra footage so newsrooms can edit, extend or create promos; 5) send along a transcript, info for ID titles, and suggest a lead. Most stations prefer a query letter describing the VNR.

WHO'S WHO IN PUBLIC RELATIONS

HONORS. PRSA's top awards to: Parry Sorensen (U Utah), Outstanding Educator Award for the advancement of public relations education; Don Padilla (Padilla & Speer), Paul M. Lund Public Service Award for contributions made to

the common good thru public service; and Pat Jackson (Jackson Jackson & Wagner), Gold Anvil Award for significant contributions to the public relations profession.

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PRSA CONFERENCE ASKS: IN A CHANGING DEMOCRATIC SOCIETY, WHAT IS THE ROLE OF PUBLIC RELATIONS? AND WHAT ACTION MUST BE TAKEN TO STRENGTHEN THE FREE SPEECH RIGHTS ON WHICH PR PRACTICE DEPENDS?

These were 2 of the mammoth questions tackled by a host of speakers at PRSA's National Conference in DC last week. Opening day chair Frank LeBart (Kearns & West, MA) set the context in noting that the world always changes faster than institutions. As part of the managements of those institutions, we need to define the pr role -- and act on that definition.

Role of Explaining Keynoter Carl Sloane, the management consultant, feels explaining is public relations' biggest job. NYNEX vice chrm William Burns supports Sloane's prediction of a move from form to substance. "If you're in pr, you must understand what's going on around you" in order to explain it.

"To tamper with the truth is to tamper with public trust, without credibility, no free society or public relations firm can long survive." So argues Charlie Wick, dir., U.S. Information Agency. In response to a question, he stated that the U.S. does not engage in disinformation practices.

The most important topic to be explained is free speech. "75% of Americans do not know about the 1st Amendment," says Betty Southard Murphy, media lawyer. "It's pr's responsibility to tell them."

Role of Maintaining Credibility Jean Otto, editorial page editor & founder of 1st Amendment Congress, warns that "credibility is the stake & never worth risking." She says role of pr is "not designing the believable lie, but developing trust to make even bad news palatable."

Helen Thomas, the senior White House correspondent, agrees credibility is everyone's greatest asset -- including the President. Reagan has had 4 public relations disasters: 1) Negotiations with Iran over hostages; 2) Reykjavik propaganda blitz to try to change public perception of outcome of Gorbachev negotiations; 3) Libyan misinformation campaign with resignation of Kalb; 4) Blackout on summits vs. Gorbachev's release of coverage.

Author Tom Wolfe predicts that for the rest of the century, the dominant social movement will be a re-embracing of tradition. "There used to be this thing, years ago, called the openable window." "Sex will give way to sentiment" pushed by fear of disease. The latest prediction is there will be 350,000 AIDS cases by 1990 -- concentrated in a few cities like SF & NY -- and all will die.

She reminded conferees that two presidents were destroyed by loss of credibility: Johnson over Vietnam, Nixon on Watergate.



Role of Internal Communicator

Harry O'Neill of ORC cited studies showing that "most employees do believe what they hear from their companies; they just don't hear enough. That they have a favorable image of their company is vital, not only because of their importance to the day-to-day functioning and growth of the company, but because employees can play an extremely useful role as company ambassadors in their communities. This role, though obvious, is often either overlooked or, if recognized, not developed in any systematic way."

Role of Agenda Setting

Edwin Feulner, pres., Heritage Foundation, outlines the most important tasks of public relations: 1) Make policymakers aware of an idea; 2) Press for its implementation.

Feulner offered guidelines for turning policy research into applied politics: a) Do credible research: separate the facts from your recommendations; b) Get the research to decisionmakers in a timely fashion; c) Keep the executive summary concise enough to fit into a crowded briefcase; d) Target its distribution -- for the Heritage Foundation this means Congress, sr. administration officials & the press.

At Heritage Foundation, 2 out of 7 senior managers have public relations roles. Out of a staff of 100, 8 are in the public relations department.

Two cautions from Feulner: 1) Ideas have consequences, more powerful than guns; 2) But getting an idea onto the public agenda takes years, so requires great persistence to affect change. Like any product, ideas have to be resold everyday.

Role of Leadership

John Paluszek, Ketchum Public Affairs, says public relations belongs at "the head of the public affairs conference table."

Why? Because "pr professionals know that in our system, people count. And they are experienced at 'working in the interface,' at the point where our organizations touch their many publics, not the least of which is gov't."

"Who is better prepared for public affairs leadership? Lawyers, who obviously know the law, but are trained in adversarial debate? Financial executives, who know the intricacies of the balance sheet but rarely understand the value of 'good will' and public opinion? Brand managers -- who rightfully wince at the banning or restriction on the sale of their products, but may not comprehend the consumer's increasing concern with product safety?"

Role of Persuasion

PRSA pres Jack Felton noted "as humans, the ability to reason, using sound as words, is what separates us from all other species. The ability to use words properly, to influence, to persuade, to mobilize, and to gain understanding is what separates public relations from other management disciplines."

The power of words is illuminated by Tom Stoppard in his play, "The Real Thing." "Words are innocent, neutral, precise, standing for this, describing that, meaning the other. So if you look after them you can build bridges across incomprehension and chaos. If you get the right words in the right order, you can nudge the world a little, or make a poem which children will speak for you when you're dead."

Role of Harmony

Allen Center believes that "to meet the turmoil ahead, our commitment must openly be proclaimed as harmony . . . harmony in public relationships." Open dialogue, with our help, leads to harmonious relations. He adds, "we must commit to a morally sound profes-

sional goal to help distinguish the worthy among us . . . & weed out the unworthy."

Once pr role models have established this credibility, "spokespersons can state directly, without committee meetings, our professional posture on communication issues such as privacy vs. the public's right to know, or the limits of license in the name of freedom."

Role of Protecting 1st Amendment Rights

Tony Navarro of W.R. Grace & Co. warns

against an erosion of 1st Amendment rights & tells how his company stood up to TV networks to protect them.

Grace was denied its right to free speech when networks refused to air its 60-sec. issue ads about the federal deficit. Reasons given were a) Ad was controversial; b) Networks reserved these subjects for news departments; c) Running ads would mean money controlled issues and d) The Fairness Doctrine, an issue Navarro feels networks would rather avoid than approach.

Feeling these arguments were debatable, Grace fought back, calling for an examination & definition of station policies, and offering to fund ads of opposing views.

Result: massive press coverage of the subject & free airing of ad by 122 independent TV stations. Conclusion: a revision of CBS's issue advertising policy because of Grace's stand.

Tho by then Grace had run out of money to actually air the ads on CBS, the option was theirs & thus was a landmark victory. (Note: Attention to the issue gave Grace's message far more mileage than running ads would have.)

BARRIERS TO THE FIRST AMENDMENT OR WHEN IS YOUR RIGHT TO SPEAK NOT YOUR RIGHT TO SPEAK?

Besides the Fairness Doctrine, PRSA Conference speakers cited other instances when the 1st Amendment is limited, twisted, even disbanded.

1. During Mergers SEC rules prohibit corporations from saying anything to anyone about the merger or takeover attempt. They are not even allowed to speak with employees, (possible shareholders) about a decision that may seriously affect their lives.

As if to prove Center's point, the first Chris Teahan Master's Thesis Award was presented to Marianne Dayrit, UFla.

Her thesis indicates that public relations practitioners are primarily engaged in "linking" activities as opposed to "monitoring" or "information processing" activities which are the primary functions of print & broadcast journalists.

According to Navarro, corporate free speech comes in 2 parts: 1) right of corporations to speak out freely on public issues that affect their company & society; 2) Commercial speech rights which allow institutions to market & promote their products & services.

"Our job as public relations people is to make sure that both these rights are respected, that our corporate point of view is heard and that the public is aware of our products."