

American "right to know" (RTK), contrarily, is generally welcomed. Moreover, it is considered an entitlement. Problem is, some information is likely to be confusing, even frightening. People who lack the background or judgment may be baffled by new info, particularly if it's technical (e.g., chemical or scientific terms, "risk factors").

Implications Tho information may be resisted, sometimes publics need to be jarred into awareness about issues. Even in USA, sensitive info (e.g. AIDS, alcoholism, child abuse) runs into roadblocks. People find these messages hard to listen to, don't know what to believe, boundaries between truth & propaganda become blurred.

Challenge for practitioners is to help educate & guide people as released data becomes public. We need to learn how best to prepare audiences, while still operating in a no-censorship mode.

Worker & community right-to-know legislation is meant to protect against energy & environmental scares, like Three Mile Island. Number of people who must legally be advised of dangers has greatly expanded. Used to be that the 300,000 chemical mfrs advised their 14 million employees of chemical hazards; now must advise another 3.5 million companies that use but don't produce chemicals.

Community right-to-know is even broader. Workers have some basis for understanding. Without this context, public at large is likely to be puzzled or alarmed by data. Responsibility falls first upon spokespersons to keep terms clear, and to respond to questions & concerns of workers, communities, press.

Some industries, & some practitioners, have opposed such RTK laws. But aren't they in the spirit of the basic public relations philosophy of openness, participative decisionmaking & the right to know about factors beyond one's control that shape living conditions?

WHO'S WHO IN PUBLIC RELATIONS

PEOPLE. David Meeker returns full time as chrm, David A. Meeker & Assocs (Akron) following unsuccessful bid in city's primary election for mayor.

ELECTED. Public Affairs Council's ofcrs: chrm, W.D. "Don" Conley (vp-pa, Honeywell, Mpls); chrm-elect, Gerald Gendell (mgr pa div, Procter & Gamble, Cincinnati); vice chairs, Barbara Burgess (sr assoc legislative counsel, John Hancock, Boston), Conrad Fowler (vp-pa, West Point-Pepperell, West Point, Ga), Ronald Budzik (vp gov't afrs, The Mead Corp, Dayton, Ohio), George Gephart (mgr pa, Baltimore Gas & Electric); treas, Stevenson Walker (dir gov't rels, Reynolds Metals, DC).

HOW DO YOU READ US?

In place of a tips & tactics, this week you'll find a readership survey questionnaire. It's planned as a how-to guide...as well as to solicit information & opinions which will make prr better able to serve your specific needs. Please fill it out and return it in the enclosed envelope. Thanks!

While you're telling us how you read prr, how about sharing what's developing in your work that your fellow readers ought to know about? Call or write prr at 603/778-0514; P.O. Box 600, Exeter, NH 03833-0600.

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WATCH OUT FOR IMPACT OF DOWNSIZING, ADVISES RICHARD ARMSTRONG, RETIRING AFTER 29 YEARS AS PRESIDENT OF THE PUBLIC AFFAIRS COUNCIL

Jobs lost, people displaced, communities abandoned. These are the human costs of downsizing & major problems business & industry will face in coming years, Richard Armstrong told prr. He has the longest tenure of any association exec in the field.

The 500 member companies & trade associations of the Washington-based organization have long grappled with "big picture" political, social & economic problems. Now, Armstrong feels, these issues are less remote, hitting closer to home.

"For the first time, a lot of people in media & government are beginning to recognize the importance of industry -- because they can see what happens to a community when a plant closes down. The lesson for public relations & public affairs people is to translate these things (corporate profitability, competitiveness, other business issues) into human terms."

"It's ironic that in spite of all the attempts made over the years to persuade & educate people in public life about the importance of pay-rolls & that type of thing, they really haven't understood it until they've seen the cost in human terms of business going out of business."

Tho he feels major downsizing has bottomed out, Armstrong still thinks an economic downturn could be a problem. Companies & industries most likely to weather adverse conditions are "those who've already had their feet held in the fire." He points to companies like Philip Morris, Union Carbide, some auto manufacturers as examples of those which have "learned to do a better job of explaining their position."

Which industries are unprepared? "The ones that are just beginning to get their feet wet now are the so-called hi-tech companies. Everyone's welcomed them -- no smoke or dirt, nice clean operations -- but as competition becomes keener & issues like hazardous waste gain ground, it'll get tough."

Downsizing's impact on public relations has been two-fold:

1. Public relations & public affairs are now closer together than ever.

"They never should have been separate. Thirty years ago public relations was more media & communications-oriented; now you see more interest in policy -- in the political, social & economic aspects of our society. Ironically, the thing that's bringing them together is the huge, Draconian cuts in corporate budgets. Downsizing means fewer specialists, so you need people who can do more than one thing."



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2. In future, beefed-up public relations & public affairs staffs.

Armstrong expects "benign" business/governmental climate to become more aggressive. Predicts we'll see attempted legislation, stronger regulation on mergers & acquisitions, takeovers, plant closings, etc. Result will probably be mandated political panaceas that corporations will have to foot the bill for. More staff will be needed in order to administer these programs.

What are the "ethics" of shifting American production overseas? Of poorly managed plant closings, corporate raiders, financial restructurings? Global economy has created some sticky problems. How business handles the situation will be major influence on public perceptions of Corporate America -- & on national political & economic policy. These issues will be focus of October 15 & 16 conference on "The Ethics of Organizational Transformation: Mergers, Takeovers & Corporate Restructuring." Nearly 50 speakers are lined up, including Goodyear CEO Robert Mercer, Allied-Signal CEO Edward Hennessy, ex-Control Data CEO Bill Norris & more. (Info from Bob Frederick, Center for Business Ethics, Bentley College, Waltham, Mass. 02254; 617/891-3433)

FRANCHISING COMES TO PUBLIC RELATIONS VIA "MARKETING METHODS" PROGRAM -- A WAY TO SERVE SMALLER BUSINESSES

"I saw there was a gap in the marketplace. No one was servicing the small & emerging businesses," Barbara Lambesis told prr. 15 months ago she developed Marketing

Methods -- a low-cost, do-it-yourself strategy & promotion plan. Providing guidance, support & materials for small biz owners to direct their own mktg/promo effort, program consists of 5 elements:

1. 3 1/2 hr small group consulting session to target markets, identify key sales messages, develop strategy for product development, pricing, distribution, promotion.
2. Workbook using fill-in-the-blank approach to manage marketing month-by-month.
3. Tactics booklet, "101 Big Ideas For Promoting A Business On A Small Budget."
4. One-yr subscription to Marketing & Management, monthly newsletter with practical info on how to market & manage a small biz.
5. One listing about the biz in firm's media Tipsheet. Price is \$165.

"The real surprise turned out to be the steady stream of loyal clients the program produces. They end up coming back for more services. Clients who have been through the program are far more knowledgeable about marketing. They understand the need to invest in promotion and become easy & profitable to work with."

Because of its success, Lambesis recently began providing licensed distributorships to small public relations firms for exclusive territories thruout the US & Canada. "We have 3 affiliates on line now" -- in San Diego, southern Arizona, Colorado. (Info from Marketing Methods, 4350 E. Camelback Rd, Phoenix 85018; 602/840-7308)

HOW TO ATTAIN EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATIONS THAT DO NOT MISS THEIR TARGET OR OVERREACH DESPITE GROWING EVIDENCE MESSAGES DON'T WORK

This is today's key question, since 2-Step Flow starts with communications that work. Some ideas being used:

1. Begin by asking what desired behavior you're trying to motivate, reinforce or modify. Instead of the usual information transfer approach, what must the communication do to elicit this behavior?

2. Always, in every message or document, provide a feedback recipient -- preferably by name (even if it's a pseudonym like Betty Crocker). People can relate to names, to persons, but rarely to organizations & other impersonal constructs. Do this, say those who find the technique powerful, even if you have to create a reason for feedback; or there is none; or you don't want or expect any. It personalizes your organization, and if used repeatedly, sends the signal that you want to interact with your publics, not talk at them.

3. Always give readers/viewers/listeners specific suggestions of actions they can take. If we want behavioral results, we cannot expect people to figure out what those behaviors are -- so lay it out for them. This is made particularly vital by Jim Grunig's finding that the missing ingredient is "constraint removal" -- showing publics they can "do something about it."

"ONE OF THE MOST COMMON NIGHTMARES FOR PUBLIC RELATIONS PEOPLE": RAIN

Responding to prr's 8/31 "ceremonial rain dance" item, Toni Muzi Ralconi, chrm, SCR Associati (Milano, Italy) writes:

"Back in the late seventies our firm organized a major (2,500 attendees) event for one of our clients in Milano. Most activities were to be held in the open air. We had no other choice but 'hope' that it would not rain. The morning of the event (which was to start at 7 pm) menacing clouds covered the sky and we prayed that a good rainstorm might come in the late morning or early afternoon in order to clear the sky for the evening. One of the waiters preparing the catering declared himself an African expert in rain dances. We chauffeured him home in a whiz to collect his recording of the rain dance. He came back, danced to the music at full blast while everyone else stared aghast. One hour later it rained like hell and by 7:15 the sky was magically (how else?) clear and blue!!"

[Do other readers have revelations of this kind? Send or call them in and we'll share them in pr reporter. The field needs a few good stories.]

SOVIET GLASNOST & AMERICAN RIGHT TO KNOW: WHAT CAN PRACTITIONERS LEARN FROM TWO DIFFERENT ATTEMPTS AT OPENNESS?

Rule #1: Know your publics so you understand how they're likely to respond to information previously unavailable to them. Washington

counselor Bruce Harrison offers these insights:

In USSR, glasnost disturbs some citizens. They feel uncomfortable about sudden lack of filters on news they had been persuaded was heretofore too sensitive for public distribution. "The sanctity of censorship within a rigidly controlled society is a form of personal security. Glasnost jars the system in which people have limited rights and virtually no responsibility for action of the state," comments Harrison.