

WHAT CAN PRACTITIONERS LEARN FROM THOSE HANDLING PUBLIC RELATIONS FOR THE ULTIMATE CEO, THE PRESIDENT OF THE UNITED STATES?

Larry Speakes, who moved from Reagan's press sec'y to vp-communications for Merrill Lynch on Feb 2, offered his insights to the Nat'l Press Club:

1. "Toughest job I had in the White House was to educate the powers-that-be that communications planners must be on the ground floor for all policy planning. Presidents have failed miserably because they were unable to communicate and thereby mold & mobilize public opinion. Leadership without communication is a ship of state without power."

2. "Press conferences have outlived their usefulness. They're theater. They're scripted. Reporters ask written questions to which the President gives a rehearsed answer. The spontaneity is lost. The press isn't looking for information. They're out to make news."

3. Tho the press is fair, they're saddled by a fault -- they're generalists. They focus on "stumble, bumble & gaffes" and ignore the broad policies. Often conflict determines what's newsworthy, especially personality conflict.

"Merrill Lynch took me on because they thought I knew pr, not because I got my name in the paper or my face on television. One thing you find is that the skills you learn in the public relations profession, particularly in government, translate into most every phase of business. Certain businesses recognize that and Merrill Lynch is one."

4. Reagan administration caters to tv, ignores newspapers because "most Americans get their news from tv." TV must recognize its responsibility and "examine the way it tells the news, the way it goes about presenting it to the American people and the impact it is having on our nation."

What Should Be Done? 5. "Let's send that well-quoted 'administration official' off to a long overdue retirement. Let government pledge to tell the story on the record. And let the press corps pledge to report it on the record."

6. Think of new & better ways to tell the news. Tell fewer stories better. Don't rate success by number of stories told, but by how they're told.

7. Exempt nightly news from Nielsen ratings. "Let's take the news business out of entertainment and put it back where it belongs, in the news department."

8. Re-examine the use of live tv. Is the story going live because the public needs to know? Or because media are afraid their competition will go live?



9. The President should: a) encourage less secrecy in gov't; b) believe the press sec'y when he says the public won't buy it; c) reinstitute unrehearsed dialogs with the press; d) make news when there is news, don't create it; e) decide policy based on what's good for people, not what's good for tv.

10. For the Office of Communication, long-range planning is about 5 minutes "because everything is coming down the pike at break-neck speed." There's a need for someone removed from daily operations who can look ahead.

Then There's
Pat Buchanan,
Leaving March 1

If one thing characterized Reagan's first administration, it was superb public relations, from strategic planning to execution. Tho elected in '80 with only 24% of Americans voting for him, (not even a majority favored him in that 3-way race) it seemed 100% had. No one dared oppose his initiatives, even when they were dubious -- so skillful were David Gergen, Mike Deaver et al. They used techniques not seen in the White House before, like briefing books & a realistic view of media.

Then Pat Buchanan got the director of communications job -- and showed again what happens when a non-professional manages public relations. For instance, his counterproductive statement that members of Congress who voted against Contra aid would "stand with the communists" was credited with defeating it. He continually clashed with other administration officials -- in public, or at least in the media. He embarrassed Reagan with his stern defense of South Africa and by saying it's okay to break laws, as Oliver North did, if the cause is justified.

The lessons here seem to be
1) don't be an ideologue, 2) pr pros must also practice pr with their managerial colleagues,
3) work to forward the boss' agenda & the administration's, not your own.

IS YOUR ORGANIZATION JOINING
"SMOKE-FREE WORKPLACE" TREND?

All-out approach was escalated by US Gypsum's announcement, along with many hospitals & health-care organizations, others. New videotape/work-book program, "90 Days To A Smoke-Free Workplace," might help. Offers step-by-step instructions for developing & implementing a smoking policy. Divided into 5 modules:
1) assess need, set goals, establish a policy development team & outline its course of action; 2) info gathering -- employee, facilities & policy surveys, labor contracts, existing trouble spots, cost containment; 3) apply info to develop policy & program; 4) how to announce the program, develop support groups, educate employees & monitor the program; 5) measure results in behavioral, bottom-line ways such as improved health of employees, reduced personnel problems, cost savings. (Rent or buy from Bureau of Business Practice, 24 Rope Ferry Road, Waterford, Ct. 06386; 800/243-0876)

Citing clear evidence that second-hand smoke can cause lung cancer in nonsmokers, Dr. C. Everett Koop, Surgeon General, has urged elimination of smoking in the workplace -- thereby handing employee relations managers another emotional issue.

Mountain Bell provides a smoke-free workplace for its 2,300 employees. To formulate the policy, a committee of mgmt & non-mgmt, union & non-union employees was formed. "We wanted employee input instead of an edict," says Lou Belmont of company's Albuquerque office. A 2-phase plan banned smoking at all Mountain Bell buildings. Employees were given time to kick the habit. Support groups were formed to help. Controversial move had support from 60-70%.

PUBLIC RELATIONS IS BECOMING
MORE SOPHISTICATED, MORE PERVASIVE,
KEY JOB OF TOP MANAGEMENT

So finds Bill Cantor in his 5th annual reading of the profession's pulse, primarily from the corporate viewpoint:

¶OVERVIEW. Economic conditions will continue to force cutbacks in corporate pr staffs. As last year (pr 1/27/86), corporations will rely more on firms, which are expanding in staff size & range of services. Technology is radically changing the way public relations functions, primarily because of the fractionating of mass audiences. The pace of change is intensifying. So is competition, here & abroad.

¶ECONOMIC CLIMATE. People are uneasy about the economy. Consumer confidence is slipping. Traditional middle-income group is shrinking. Some retailers are shunning this group; some have already abandoned them in favor of the rich or the poor.

¶CORPORATE PUBLIC RELATIONS. Corporations have cut back on the number of pr people, not programs. Large number of middle mgmt pr jobs have disappeared. Salaries of those remaining have stabilized. Current wave of mergers & acquisitions has caused many senior pr people to be offered early retirement. Some are offered silver, if not golden, parachutes. Some are going into freelancing -- a growing career path. Others are opening counseling firms. Since corp pr staffing goes in cycles, rate of hiring will resume probably by end of '87, early '88.

SALARIES are stabilizing, but could rise by the end of '87 -- perhaps by 10%. Medium basic salary remains in the \$30,000 - \$45,000 range. Entry level is \$16,000 or less; middle mgmt from \$45,000 to \$80,000; top execs from \$85,000 to \$175,000 before perks, with a few over \$200,000. Fringe benefits & perks are being reduced somewhat.

¶COUNSELING FIRMS. They're doing well: increasingly being used by corporations, aggressively pursuing smaller emerging corporations that need to make themselves known. Acquisitions by ad agencies continue. Picture has changed dramatically from several years ago. Today there are only a few giant pr firms (mostly owned by publicly-held ad agencies), just a few privately held independent firms, and a proliferating number of small-to-medium sized firms. The likelihood is that some will merge as the cycle continues.

¶NEW DIRECTIONS FOR PUBLIC RELATIONS. Top mgmt is increasingly looking to pr for guidance in handling its complicated relationships. While leaders in pr shift their focus to influencing policy & strategic planning, others continue to concentrate on publicity. Emphasis has shifted to monitoring potentially sensitive issues as they develop and before they become troublesome. It is no longer a matter of which groups to encourage & embrace, but to anticipate & handle numerous concerns among many publics. As the world becomes a "global village," pr grows more sophisticated worldwide. (Copy from Cantor Concern, 171 Madison Avenue, NYC 10016; 212/481-0000)

USEFUL ITEMS FOR PRACTITIONERS

¶Publicity opportunity: Personalities & spokespersons are being sought for the 1987/88 Talk Show Guest Directory. Annual directory, in its 4th year, reviews thousands of potential guests for the media. Listings are free, publisher's case histories show it works. Deadline is March 31. (Details & free Invitation Kit

from Mitchell Davis, Broadcast Interview Source, 2500 Wisconsin Ave NW, Wash DC 20007-4570)

¶Alberta's Professional & Occupational Associations Registration Act (t&t 12/2/85) -- an "Umbrella Act" intended to regulate professions & occupations -- has been proclaimed and applications for registration sent out. Once an ass'n registers, its members are governed by the Act's regulations and are entitled to use the titles & abbreviations reserved for them. It works apart from the gov't. Self-governing authority sanctioned by law enables the ass'n to set & maintain professional standards among its members. (Copies of official explanation & registration form from prr)

¶No new major SEC changes are listed this year in Doremus Porter Novelli's 12th annual report checklist. Outlines what the SEC requires, what Doremus recommends and what timetable to follow. Under recommendations, Doremus suggests feature treatments in many areas including depth of management, marketing skills, production achievements. And says 18 weeks is the ideal schedule for AR production. (Copy from them at 120 Broadway, NYC 10271)

¶Entries for the 42nd Annual Silver Anvil Awards Competition must be submitted by March 6. Competition, sponsored by PRSA, is open to members & nonmembers. Programs are judged on use of research, planning, execution & evaluation of results. Awards both recognize excellence and advance standards in the profession. (Forms & info from PRSA, 845 3rd Ave, NYC 10022)

¶Different holiday message characterizes Independent Sector's annual New Year's card: "You are among those who encourage the democratic cacophony to hear better the individual shrieks -- and songs." Timing is also different. Card arrives after the onslaught of Christmas & Hanukkah greetings, stands out in its singularity.

¶The power of choice semantic choices continues. Take this healthcare example. If you had a minor but irritating malady which frightens because for a few days it causes one side of your face to droop, would you want to learn you have Bell's Palsy? Probably not. But how about "Mona Lisa's disease?" When it was noted the subject of DaVinci's painting probably suffered from the same, accounting for her famous but unusual smile, medicos began using the new term. Patients reportedly feel "200% better." And in Europe you don't speak with any effect if you talk of "consumers' rights." Too American. Instead, in the European mode, one speaks of "consumer sovereignty."

WHO'S WHO IN PUBLIC RELATIONS

DIED. Malcolm ("Mac") MacKillop, Public Affairs Council's '86 chrm and svp-corp rels, Pacific Gas & Electric.

Jerry Russom, pres, Russom & Co. Public Relations (SF). He received PRSA's Public Service Award in '83, was San Rafael city councilman.

CANDIDATE. Dave Meeker, pres of his own firm, running for mayor of Akron.

SERVING. Dave Ferguson, sr consultant, Hill & Knowlton (Chi), named volunteer chrm of Corp Comn Advisory Cmte, American Red Cross...Bill Greener, svp-pa, G.D. Searle & Co., on transition team for Nat'l Security Council under its new leadership...Jim Strenski, chrm, Public Communications (Tampa), elected chrm UFla Business Advisory Council for school's pr program.