

Meetings are open to the entire staff, tho on occasion a closed-door group convenes to adjudicate highly sensitive or confidential issues. Committee examines 1) job-related ethical questions posed by staff members, as well as 2) hypothetical situations & 3) general ethical issues of specific interest to the profession. Subject matter has included:

Committee has no routine schedule but tries to meet at least six times a year. Meetings are well attended -- at least partially due to the incentive of a free catered lunch. But Smirnoff says it's more than food that motivates attendees. "No one hesitates to open a can of worms. The meetings are so lively that it's hard to end...no one wants to leave!"

¶Departing employees who take accounts along;

¶What to do when it's discovered that a client is providing intentionally erroneous information;

¶Clarifying relationships with a client whose public policies or products may be offensive.

Most recently, the committee met to dissect the issue of insider trading to be certain there was clarity about appropriate behavior.

Does the Ethics Committee work? Is it more than an interesting intellectual exercise? Co-chair Susan Smirnoff told pr, "It's not intended to be a court or to pronounce judgment, but to provide a forum where different sides of an issue can be aired." This approach has made meetings popular with junior level professionals who view it as an opportunity to hone their skills.

¶PRSA's Assembly & Symposium II on Demonstrating Professionalism, meeting last week in New Orleans, took several steps to strengthen enforcement of its Code of Professional Standards: 1) investigations of violations will continue even when a member resigns, with determinations & sanctions publicly announced if appropriate; 2) the Board may suspend any officer whose behavior may have violated the code; 3) dues payment constitutes reaffirmation of the code; 4) urged counselors to add a statement on ethics into client contracts and 5) employers to adopt PRSA's code as the official standard of conduct for its pr staff; 6) seek adoption of a common code among all pr societies. (For copies of reports, write pr or PRSA.)

RATHER THAN JUST USING MEDIA PEOPLE AS A CONDUIT FOR PUBLICITY, CHRYSLER TREATS THEM AS CONSUMERS AS WELL

Promo for its '87 LeBaron Coupe includes a viewmaster (remember your childhood toy?), 1 reel & a personalized letter -- along with the typical news release. Letter explains contest based on viewmaster & 3 reels -- 2 more will be sent over the next few weeks. Journalists who successfully name the 3 barons from a clue given in each reel, win prizes.

Not only the contest, but the viewmaster attracts attention. The 3-dimensional views it offers of the car are arresting. And the viewmaster, bearing a Chrysler sticker, is likely to be passed around or taken home to kids -- garnering on-going awareness value. One drawback: computer cover letter from gen'l mktg mgr is too pitchy, crammed onto a single page in small type.

pr reporter

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NEV'S NAGGING QUESTION: AFTER ENUNCIATING A MISSION, PUSHING DECISIONMAKING DOWNWARD IN THE ORGANIZATION, ORGANIZING IN TEAMS ETC., WHAT DO WE DO NEXT?

Nevius Curtis is CEO of Delmarva Power (Wilmington, Del.) -- a leader in state-of-the-art public relationship & management strategies. But once they have been applied, how then do we get the organization to function according to their tenets on a day-to-day, operational level? How do we build these philosophies so completely into the culture that people normally behave accordingly?

The answer rests in middle management. Even in the military & labor unions, it is the problem group -- a bastion of status quo gatekeeping. Can we find techniques to make middle managers contributors rather than barriers? The public relations strategy of participation & involvement may be the answer:

1. ISSUE ANTICIPATION TEAMS. We all know our organizations have to anticipate issues. But assigning it to a specialist, to an officer or even to a department has not worked out in most cases -- for a variety of reasons. Setting up IA teams both meets the need and deals with the middle management "wall." Teams usually involve managers from all ranks & departments. To keep interest high, teams report every so often to a formal "issues board" comprised of senior officers. Some organizations have one team that looks at the realm of issues. Others have several teams concentrating on specific areas of concern. At its simplest, the team answers 2 questions: 1) What's happening out there? 2) Could it happen to us?

Benefits a) Serving on a team is an honor, which motivates the members. b) It forces them to read and observe things they previously didn't. c) Members have to interact with folks they might not come in contact with otherwise. d) Consensus & teamwork are essential.

e) Managers actually supervising the daily work start to think broadly about the implications of what the organization does. It sensitizes managers to public relationships. f) Helps identify & train the rising stars. Without

"As we develop teamwork and team effectiveness, we also have to change the reward system (promotion & merit increases) to conform. We are modifying the way supervisors evaluate -- a radical (we think) change. We are putting more emphasis on a strong link between performance/method of getting the job done and pay. We are also making a distinction between the component that goes into base pay and that component that does not go into base pay. The philosophy, methodology, forms, and training were all developed by multi-disciplinary teams. It is too early to tell how it will all work out. I suspect highly motivated people will tend to like it and less motivated people will not like it," Curtis feels.



such a mechanism, too often the fast trackers are merely expert in their narrow sphere. Then, when they get to the top, their narrowness causes problems -- especially for their public relations staffs. Issue anticipation teams broaden a number of managers early in their careers.

2. CONSTITUENCY RELATIONS PROGRAMS. A 2-step initiative, this begins by compiling a list of opinion leaders among your key publics. A criterion for identifying them is essential (see pr 5/19/86). Then managers at all levels (& non-managerial personnel, if appropriate) pay personal visits to each OL once or twice a year. These are primarily listening events, tho some messages can be delivered as well -- even marketing ones. The results are entered into a computer database.

For his company, Curtis says, "The next two to three years are going to be critical. Our earnings are under severe pressure because of regulatory actions. Query: Can the participative, people-focused culture stand the test of hard times? I think it can, but we won't know for awhile."

Then, by a) systematizing, b) targeting & c) computerizing feedback from typical outreach efforts like speakers bureaus, company-paid memberships, contributions programs, et al, the organization has a perpetual research mechanism without peer. And -- all of these are manned primarily by middle managers. But since they are too often viewed as discrete projects far out of the mainstream, the corollary benefit of blasting these potential problem people out of their complacency is lost.

Pulling all this together in a Constituency Relations Program puts middle managers "out there" where they are sensitized to the wider implications of all the organization does. They become part of management in reality.

"IN MY 25 YEARS IN THE ANNUAL REPORT BUSINESS, I HAVE NEVER SEEN SO MUCH GOOD NEWS GOING OUT"

So says Richard Lewis of Corporate Annual Reports. Previously, "disaster stories have been the

rule." Why the change? "T. Boone Pickens, Carl Icahn and other raiders have shocked corporate America into action. Result: CEOs are aggressively restructuring their companies -- before it's done for them by a hostile takeover." (See t&t 4/6.)

"Today's breed of CEOs are tougher; they are making the hard decisions necessary for survival. As American business passes through the current restructuring period, it should move into a more stable era where long-term thinking & planning again becomes possible."

He points to Bell South's 1986 annual report -- "the most significant we've produced in our 25 year history" -- as a harbinger: 1) "Today we see very few companies willing, in their annual reports, to look out more than 3 to 5 years. BellSouth's, as a counterpoint, looks to the year 2000." 2) It examines the future by focusing on education, urban planning, economics, the impact of change itself and the question, "How best to live a life? 3) Uses outside authorities, presenting the views of futurist Alvin Toffler, city planner & transportation authority Catherine Ross, economist Martin Feldstein, author James Dickey, former US Sec'y of Education Terrel Bell. (Copy from BellSouth, 1155 Peachtree St. NE, Atlanta 30367-6000)

The bellwethers-- how companies are strengthening themselves: a) restructuring, b) refinancing, c) employee cutbacks, d) asset liquidation, e) more efficient operations, f) foreign currency gains, g) acquisitions, h) leading market share.

PLAIN ENGLISH HITS THE AUTO INDUSTRY: FORD HAS REWRITTEN ITS WARRANTY BOOKLET, PLANS TO SIMPLIFY OTHER DOCUMENTS

"More & more managers are looking at enhanced communications as an 'edge,'" explains The Document Design Center, creator of Ford's new warranty

booklet. Old one was a tightly-printed, 12-panel folder with technical info presented in a format of boxes & columns. New document is a center-stitched booklet that is easier to handle. Clear writing, short paragraphs, lots of white space & bulleted lists make for easy reading.

Document Design Center uses research-based criteria which it presents in its handbook, "Guidelines for Document Designers":

1. 10-point type: Research shows 8 to 10 point type is most readable. Readers often skim over text that is too small.

2. White space (wide margins, indents, occasional short pages) is as much an element in the design as type itself. It keeps the document from looking crowded. And informs readers by emphasizing what's important.

"This move by Ford reflects a growing trend among organizations to use plain English because it a) increases goodwill with consumers, employees & other key audiences; b) reduces consumer complaints & questions; c) reduces the time to process paperwork; d) increases sales of products & services; e) increases response rates from bills & dunning letters."

3. Ragged right margin gives the document a relaxed, contemporary look many find more inviting.

4. Short lines: A document is easier to read when the line of type doesn't go all the way across an 8 1/2" page. Optimal line length for most text is 50-70 characters.

5. Use boldface (for headings or to emphasize a word or two) instead of ALL CAPS. A lot of text printed in ALL CAPS makes reading difficult. (Copy of handbook from Document Design Center, American Institute for Research, 1055 Thomas Jefferson St. NW, Rm.4A, Wash DC 20007; 202/342-5000; \$10 prepaid)

HOW ONE FIRM HANDLES QUESTIONS ON ETHICS

Hashing out ethical dilemmas may be a hot topic today, but Ruder, Finn & Rotman's internal Ethics Committee has been in place since the 50s -- when a valuable employee was blacklisted during the McCarthy era. To examine the firm's ethical response to the situation, and to the employee, an ad hoc committee was established & has been in place since.

It consists of internal staff and outside advisors, including a rabbi from Jewish Theological Seminary and the chair of the sociology dep't at Williams College. Their role is to guide discussions, provide objectivity, and contribute moral and interpersonal insight.