

ITEMS OF INTEREST TO PRACTITIONERS

New "Dear Betty Crocker" column shows old formats can work. Distributed to 8,000 daily & weekly newspapers in Q&A format. Result of successful test, based on the popular (but fictitious) spokesperson's known appeal: Betty Crocker consumer respondents answer over 300,000 questions annually. No brand names will be mentioned -- just generic terms & commonly understood kitchen lingo. Old cooks never die...

To help practitioners who need facts on people & legislative processes in national health policymaking, "Congress & Health" handbook is now available. 96-pg resource includes directory of Congress members & their health aides, info on major health committees, discussion of health issues within current Congress, & procedures for turning a bill into law. (National Health Council, 622 Third Ave, NYC, 10017; \$11.00)

Customer relations training for doctors' offices is available on cassettes. Created by Richard Gilberg, author of the CARE guest relations program for hospitals (see prr 7/23/84), basic training course can help physicians build their practices in an increasingly competitive marketplace. Growing number of doctors, consumer sophistication & increased options for care have heightened competition for patients. Increase in lawsuits has escalated the cost & risk of practicing medicine. Program involves entire staff in attracting & retaining more patients, reducing risk of lawsuits from dissatisfied patients, improving productivity & profits by effectively motivating staff. "Doctors tend to focus their attention on practicing medicine and leave the business & customer service aspects to the staff. They usually don't realize that rude or cold behavior from the staff is causing a problem until they start losing patients. When this happens, they don't know how to turn things around without taking time away from their medical activities to oversee the business-side," says Gilberg. Self-study program deals with this problem. ("Building Patient Satisfaction In The Physician's Office," album, 6 tapes & workbook, \$98.50 from R.L. Gilberg & Assocs, 463 Buckeye Drive, Wheeling, Ill. 60090; 312/537-2322)

Professional development is narrowing the male/female pay gap in communicators' salaries according to biennial survey of IABC members. Salaries in US, Canada & Britain are up slightly since previous study in '85. But women's salaries -- though still on average \$5,500 lower than men's -- increased nearly twice as much (8.6%) as men's (4.7%). According to prr's '87 Annual Survey of the Profession, women's median salary lags behind men's by \$15,312. Only men's rose since last year, and then only by \$812 (see prr 9/14). Conflict in findings is probably due to technical specialist jobs held by great majority of IABC members, whereas Annual Survey covers all levels of practice.

WHO'S WHO IN PUBLIC RELATIONS

DIED. G. Edward Pendray on Sept. 5, in Somerset, NJ. "Father of Accreditation" who guided PRSA's pioneering

certification for practitioners thru many trials to gain adoption of the idea.

ELDERCARE RIVALS CHILDCARE AS RISING CONCERN AMONG WORKFORCE;  
PROGRAMS AT THE TRAVELERS & SOUTHWESTERN BELL HELP EMPLOYEES COPE,  
DEMONSTRATE SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY TO AGING POPULATION

Growing numbers of workers face caring for elderly or chronically ill relatives. Like pressures of childcare, demands upon employees who must juggle work & caregiving obligations can result in erosion of productivity & morale -- as well as increased absenteeism, tardiness & healthcare costs. Moreover, many workers are unable to work overtime, accept promotions, participate in training or work-related travel assignments, take vacations.

Flagship Research By The Travelers Indicates an unexpectedly high percentage (nearly 20%) of its workforce, age 30 and over, spend significant amounts of time caring for an older person. This internal need, plus general demographic trends toward longer life, motivated Travelers to develop a caregiver initiative for employees as part of its Older Americans Program.

"One of the reasons we chose aging as an issue to focus our resources on was that it was consistent with our business interests and we felt the issue wasn't being adequately addressed by the private sector," Alice Simon, media relations, told prr. Corporate communications & personnel dep'ts joined forces to develop a program:

American Association of Retired Persons (AARP) estimates some 100 companies have launched eldercare programs in the past 2 years aimed at assisting employees with their caregiving needs. To help develop such services, AARP has a pilot kit which includes how to organize fairs & educational seminars. (Contact AARP, 3200 E. Carson St, Lakewood, Calif 90712)

1) Caregiving Fair, with more than 20 community agencies represented, provided information on a variety of topics including home healthcare, adult daycare, legal & financial help, coping with stress. High-visibility event was held at lunchtime outside the cafeteria. Over 700 employees & retirees attended.

2) Educational Seminars focus on eldercare topics such as family decisionmaking, housing options, coping with change.

3) Weekly Support Groups staffed by professional counselors let employee caregivers share problems & ideas.

4) Series of Caregiving Articles, featuring interviews with experts in field, is planned for upcoming issues of company newsletter.



5) Revised Personnel Policies & Programs introduced a) flextime to facilitate need for individual schedules; b) dependent care allowance which automatically deducts pre-tax dollars from paycheck for deposit into special account for dependent care expenses; c) allowance of up to 4 weeks per year of unpaid personal leave.

Southwestern Bell Telephone Estimates that more than 15,000 employees -- over 25% of its staff -- now care for aging parents or relatives. Company is concluding research to determine where & how best to develop programs in its 5-state service area.

Using information gathered to date, SWB has produced a program entitled "Care-giving: the Challenge of Elder Care" -- available at modest cost to external organizations. Developed with guidance of older adult advocacy groups, such as National Council on The Aging, program is designed to raise awareness of the emotional, financial & physical burdens faced by caregivers and demonstrate how the private sector can respond. It includes:

1) 28-minute video documentary entitled "We're Not Alone." Narrated by actress Collen Dewhurst, it profiles caregivers, presents advice by experts on care for the aging & information on resources.

2) Resource manual gives step-by-step approach, divided into 3 parts: resource information for healthcare professionals; community groups, churches or synagogues; and employers of caregivers in the workplace.

3) Audiotape entitled "I Care." Since caregiver's time is so precious, tape can be played in car while on the go.

"Even though it's hard to measure lost productivity due to stress & distraction, it's real. If there's anything we can do to lighten the burden of these caregiving employees, it'll pay off," Kevin Conway, news relations, told pr.

Program is available at no charge to nonprofit organizations within SWB service area (Arkansas, Kansas, Missouri, Oklahoma & Texas); NPOs & organizations elsewhere are charged a nominal fee. For each package ordered by a business, SWB donates one package to a nonprofit organization of that business' choice. (For info or copy of program -- \$500, \$175 NPOs -- contact Denise Panyk-Dale, Southwestern Bell, 1010 Pine St., Rm. 921, St. Louis, Mo 63101; 314/235-8876)

ADVOCATES OF EMPLOYEE RELATIONS  
NEED TO SET GOOD EXAMPLE  
SO PR FIRM STARTS OWN PROGRAM

To improve employee relations & promote high standards in its workplace, Public Communications Inc's 3 offices (Coral Gables, Tampa, Chi) developed an internal recognition program.

Basis is a Standards of Professional Excellence document created by staff.

"Though we've created many employee relations programs for clients, we were like the shoemaker's children. We didn't pay as much attention to the employee relations needs of our own firm," Charlotte Luer, vp, told pr. Standards were developed at chrm Jim Strenski's prompting to make sure everyone in firm was speaking from same platform.

Document contains 33 guidelines in 4 categories:

1. Service. "...should be the solution, not part of the problem."

2. Teamwork. "Look for the best in people and you will find it."

3. Leadership. "A good leader credits others when things go right, takes responsibility when things go wrong."

4. Communication. "Avoid formal written communication when informal discussion will do."

Beginning this month, rotating team of employees will select monthly nominee who best exemplifies the standards. Winner receives \$200, recognition at an impromptu congratulatory party.

Response has been enthusiastic, Luer reports. Importantly, since standards were created by employees & not management, program enjoys total support.

THOUGH NO LONGER CONSIDERED "JUST" COMMUNICATORS,  
PRACTITIONERS NEED TO SHARPEN WRITING SKILLS

As public relations' scope broadens beyond communication, practitioners are de-empha-

sizing writing skills. But in public relations, merely competent writing isn't good enough, Phil Lesly told PRSA Puget Sound (WA) chapter. "The difference between a merely competent writer and a really good writer is the difference between a hamburger chef at McDonald's and the head chef at Lutece: both will provide you with sustenance, but only one will make a memorable impression on you."

To influence various audiences, public relations writers need to develop flexibility. Consider the difference in skills needed to write a good speech, annual report, feature story, report, letter.

Challenge is greater because today audiences are 1) less able to read; 2) less willing to read; 3) overwhelmed by communications overload; 4) likely to distort what they do read. Lesly offers these reminders for effective writing:

1. Clarity. You're not talking down to a Ph.D. if you write so a high school dropout can understand -- unless you write condescendingly.
2. Brevity. Any manuscript should be like a bikini -- big enough to cover the subject but brief enough to constantly hold the audience's interest.
3. Precision. Use exactly the right word. Writing that is "almost right" is like an "almost right" 23-foot leap over a 25-foot chasm.
4. Purpose. Are you trying to persuade or convince? Inform or record? Motivate or justify? Be sure what you write does what you set out to do.