

- B. Coalition syndrome: Say a stable of runners is promoting a brand of shoes. Can this cause consumers to think "everybody does it" & create peer pressure? If so, how high would be the cost of signing up most of the heroes?

LET PUBLIC DISCLOSURE
IMPROVE YOUR PUBLIC IMAGE,
SAYS AIR PRODUCTS & CHEMICALS

"The Title III law is an opportunity," says Tony Diglio, dir of environmental activities, Air Products & Chemicals (Allentown, Pa).

"If we do a good job in explaining to the community what all this info means, we will enhance the reputation of Air Products & the industry & allay the fears of the public."

Prior to SARA III, AP&C 1) responded to community's post-Bhopal fear by "opening their doors for discussion"; 2) trained employees on the subject of hazardous materials; 3) worked closely with fire & safety authorities; 4) conducted joint emergency drills; 5) initiated Safety Roundtable.

Despite AP&C's preparedness, SARA III presents problems -- e.g. disclosure of specified materials means risk of giving away "trade secrets" or inciting litigation from environmental groups. "The two biggest challenges from a communication standpoint are 1) risk comn & 2) public concern," comty rels mgr Pam Handwerk told prr. "We are telling people about the chemicals we use...and we have to deal with their reaction. Our main objective is getting people to see that many companies in the chemical industry act responsibly in areas of safety & the environment."

Handwerk says AP&C decided to meet the challenge head on. "We took the initiative position very early. We didn't feel it was wise, necessary, or in anyone's best interest to wait for the people to come to us. AP&C made a decisive effort to not only comply with the letter of the law, but the spirit of the law as well. It is to all our benefit when everyone understands the industry & some of the 'mysteries of the unknown' are diffused."

In reporting data, AP&C took a grassroots approach using local plant managers. "We asked them to develop their own communication plan. They brought insight, ideas, a degree of newness into the project. And even the most skeptical among them shouldered the communication effectively." Managers reached public via media tours, employee comn programs, community hearings, & by maintaining ties with local emergency officials. "The best approach is the direct approach," says Handwerk.

ITEMS OF VALUE TO PROFESSIONALS

¶Insider-information risks for pr execs went up exponentially when SEC sued a purchasing agent at Toys 'R' Us last week. It claims he made a sizable profit in stock options by exercising them after he learned the company had exceptionally good sales in 2 key holiday months last year. That type of data is common knowledge to pr staff & counsel -- plus many other types of info that could eventually affect stock prices. While only corporate officers ordinarily get option rights & would be in exactly the position of this case, here's another example SEC means to end insider trading in all its forms.

¶HONORS. Charlie Wellborn (prof of journalism & comn, U of Fla) receives the annual John W. Dillan Award for professional contributions to the Fla PR Ass'n.

pr reporter

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PR AS CHANGE AGENT: WITH REORGANIZATION THE TREND,
PRACTITIONERS GET AN OPPORTUNITY TO SHOW DEPTH OF SKILLS

Acquisitions, mergers, intense competition & divestitures are putting pressure on all types of organizations to restructure. Yes, the change is traumatic, especially when RIFs or downsizing result. But it can be a rare opportunity for public relations to show its relevance to mainstream operations & major goals, say those who've been there.

The Implications
Of Reorganization

"Initially, there are no benefits, just huge scares," Mike Rosow of Work In America Institute (Scarsdale, NY) told prr.

"An organization's decision to restructure creates waves of uncertainty among employees, sending the message that 1) the company's financial structure is not stable & 2) jobs are no longer secure." Indeed, significant reduction of personnel is often involved. For the employees left behind, life is not much better. They "have the burden of increased workloads, less support staff, and the threat that they, too, could be let go."

John Budd, vice chrm-elect of Carl Byoir Assocs, agrees: "You have to be sensitive to the impact on the survivors. If management proceeds with 'business as usual,' it's making a mistake. A more creative approach is necessary."

The Role Of PR

Abundant opportunities exist for ushering the organization thru the change.

"It takes time to turn the psychology around," Budd told prr. "People love the security of the familiar and get nervous about change. It must be implemented gently. We sometimes think of communication as being the final act of the process, but it's only the beginning. Practitioners can bring 'value added' to their roles by anticipating long range, profound impacts & addressing them before they become issues." He suggests:

¶preparing employees with meetings, speeches, memos, videos.

¶"spelling it all out" when announcing the change "so no one thinks there is a hidden agenda."

¶regularly updating employees with progress reports. "This will help them to be part of the change & to realize nothing is being held back from them."

John Budd, leaving as vp-pr at oft-changed Emhart, finds this a normal, healthy process. "Look at it in a positive way. The process of change is indigenous to good management & will be with us forever. It is not a phenomenon. Reorganization presents pr with a chance to become more sophisticated. To get away from the pap & pabulum." (For copy of his thoughts on restructuring, write prr.)



issuing constant communication from the top. "It's important for management & practitioners to realize reality is not fact, but what the employees perceive as reality is. They hear & read what you say with their own set of criteria and prejudices. Managers gets bored with presenting the same story but they must keep telling it to the employees to get their messages out. The CEO must put his thoughts on the line & develop a vision for them."

Decentralization Major Method Of Reorganization

Plant moves create negative reactions because they mean transferring or laying off employees, perhaps to take advantage of cheap labor. Consolidation means shrinkage -- people become redundant. Budd says reorganizational trends are cyclical & tend to come & go. Rosow agrees, "When a few of the major corporations start doing it, the others follow suit. It begins with the corporate leaders, then it snowballs." But decentralization, fragmenting the organization into several units, is, according to Budd, perhaps the most durable method of restructuring as corporations continue to "go global." It makes sense geographically, plus there exists a belief that less bureaucracy will be more powerful & improve productivity.

Theoretically, says Rosow, decentralizing means decisionmaking is pushed down and out to various operating units. Some organizations run aground when they go only "half-way" -- fragmenting but not distributing authority. "There should be an abundance of opportunities for those remaining, providing employee participation is planned on & encouraged." Ergo, decentralization aims at traditional pr goals!

Well-executed decentralization can reap positive results:
a) members have closer proximity to power base; b) promotion seems more plausible; c) innovation is inspired; d) changes & new methods can be tested on a smaller scale; e) teamwork increases; f) opportunities to take part in decision-making are more abundant -- all relationship improvers.

Good Or Bad For PR? Region vs Headquarters

"When an organization gets back on course, the decentralized pr departments may have control," says Rosow. "That means decisionmaking, budget control, etc. will go to the regional bases, providing this is in the plan." Budd says this is ideal, but certain policies must be set at headquarters. "Senior pr cannot dictate specifics to units thousands of miles away. They must, however, set standards." Budd illustrates with an example. "At Emhart, we never say 'No comment' to the press because it is more of an affirmation than a denial. This is one pr policy that is standard thruout the organization."

Johnson & Johnson vp-pr Larry Foster told prr retaining senior pr service at corporate headquarters serves all units effectively. "All of our companies are pretty independent, but only a few have pr capacities. For the most part, the corporate pr dep't acts as counselor to the affiliate companies or we help them to find counsel from an outside firm." He acknowledges that pr needs become different when an organization decentralizes. Internal communication, establishing goals, policies, etc. can be a concern. J&J responds with international meetings -- gathering managers together to talk philosophy, voice concerns, discuss progress & identify goals.

Techniques: Communication alone won't get over the shoals of change, so savvy organizations add the vital peer element. US West trained 100

identifiable internal opinion leaders as "Change Champions" to be sounding boards, conduct worksite research, keep people informed -- and train additional Change Champions. Bell Canada uses issue anticipation teams as charters of change, since the way to avoid negative issues usually means internal change in some form.

AN OLYMPIC-SIZE QUESTION: CAN SPORTS HEROES CAUSE PUBLICS TO BUY PRODUCTS OR CAUSES?

Disbarred gold medal winner Ben Johnson blew \$12-million in endorsement earnings when he was banned for steroid use. His yearly take as a world-class runner has been \$800,000, reports the Chicago Tribune. Is he -- or any celebrity -- really worth it? The question has been undecided among practitioners longer than the modern Olympics.

We can identify 5 classes of "influentials":

Type	Effect
1. Role models	Admiration, emulation
2. Opinion leaders	Peer pressure, desire to go along
3. Power leaders	Fear due to power to reward or punish
4. Cheerleaders	Boost morale, even in incredulous situations
5. Celebrities	Attraction, awareness

As a rule, they hold clout in about this order. Occasionally, one person will hold more than one of these positions in a public or group -- but rarely. Power leaders, for instance, hold formal leadership positions which in most cases reduces their credibility with the "gang" to the point it is difficult for them to be opinion leaders. Instead, one or more informal leaders -- not in positions of legitimate authority -- become the opinion leaders in the group.

The public relations body of knowledge suggests celebrities can't do much more than create awareness for most products -- and much of that must be shared with the attention attracted to the celeb him- or herself. Here's a self-test of the theory: pick 5 or 6 celebs, then see if you can name the items they endorse. If they've become the spokespersons for the product, like Cliff Robertson for AT&T, it's possible. Otherwise... But are there exceptions:

A. Full relevance: Say a Johnson is promoting running gear or shoes? Do enough other runners want to emulate heroes to the point of buying the products? Obviously only certain personality types in the public would do so, but are they numerous enough to make high celeb fees pay off?

Johnson's case + the many other sports star scandals suggest a new rule: Don't run bragging ads about your endorsers' feats until a few days have passed, in case the other shoe drops (no pun intended). Toshiba Canada rushed into print with "You're a winner, Ben" copy as soon as the Toronto sprinter grabbed the gold. Now they've dropped the series he's been featured in, probably hoping no one will remember.