

SENSE OF HUMOR GREAT PR TOOL BUT DOES CORPORATE AMERICA HAVE ONE?

Its foul-ups & blunders receive attention in The Misfortune 500 (Pocket Books, \$7.95). An "outrageous chronicle of America's corporate geniuses in their worst moments," claims promo piece. "It is a portfolio of the most ill-conceived advertising campaigns, the worst promotional plans, the greatest abuses of company funds, and the most fact-free annual reports."

Authors Bruce Nash & Allan Zullo wrote to 35 CEOs asking for a 5-minute phone conversation "telling us one true, humorous story about business. Not a single CEO cooperated." So instead they scoured biz pub'ns, interviewed consultants & consumer advocates, contacted industry ass'ns & biz schools, read ARs, proxy statements, news accounts. Book is not a ranking of the 500 worst biz practices. "Rather it is a primer on how not to conduct business."

Can public relations laugh at itself? Here's a sample from the book: "General Motors tried a public relations gimmick that backfired in 1982. Shortly after negotiations between the automaker & the United Auto Workers began, GM chairman Roger Smith and union chief Douglas Fraser held a press conference to announce that any savings generated by a wage-concession agreement would be passed on to consumers through reduced sticker prices. So what happened? Thousands of customers postponed new GM car purchases until the labor agreement had been signed 3 months later."

"We called companies to verify the facts, but only succeeded in giving anxiety attacks to dozens of corporate relations vice-presidents who were slow to talk & quick to hang up."

ITEMS

80% of public believes gov't should support scientific research, even when it brings no immediate benefits, shows National Science Board survey. 8th biennial report, "Science & Engineering Indicators -- 1987," provides data about US science & technology, including info on education, employment, expenditures, international competition, public attitudes. Most US respondents do not feel they have a clear understanding of basic scientific concepts. 2/3rds are dissatisfied with the quality of science teaching. By large majorities, the public agrees every high school student should be required to take a science & math course every year. (Copy of report (NSF 87-1) from Supt of Documents, US Gov't Printing Office, Wash DC 20402; request stock number 038-000-00578-2)

Birthday bash for Mickey Mouse -- 60 yrs old on Nov 18 -- has enviable promo budget of \$100 million. Plans include introduction of merchandise such as clothing, coins & collectibles; tv special airing Nov 4; \$multimillion tie-in with M&M/Mars that cuts across several brands; 64-pg commemorative mag to be issued Aug 1 under the Disney logo by People magazine. Talk about Big Picture projects.

Nifty targeted message in disguise describes Citicorp's ad campaign "Profiles in Congress" on CNN. Title's takeoff on JFK book doesn't hurt. Appears to be public service education about our gov't & its elected officials. In fact, it rewards Citi's choice of MCs -- who need continual name recognition & awareness activities to further careers, be successful legislators, jump to private sector. Nice strategy.

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WORKPLACE POLICIES, PART IV -- THE DAYCARE SYMBIOSIS: WORKING PARENTS NEED EMPLOYER HELP IN FINDING SOLUTIONS WHICH IN TURN CAN AID MAJOR GOALS LIKE PRODUCTIVITY

The shift to dual careers (now estimated to be 40% of workforce) & single-parent families (6%) has created a huge demand for childcare -- increasingly an opportunity for employers. According to Conference Board statistics, employers offering some kind of childcare assistance has increased fivefold in four years. Yet concern for family needs of workers has not grown in proportion to demographic need, growing societal pressure -- or very real potential payoffs for employers.

Roadblocks In an era of cost-cutting & downsizing, family concerns aren't high priority for many org'ns. Others are concerned about potential problems: costs, liability, obligations incurred by referrals, quality control, equity issues. Most common obstacles, according to John Basset Place of Developmental Child Care (Westport, Ct.) which assists employers in locating, designing & implementing programs, are:

1. Management unaware. Decisionmakers tend to be senior execs who grew up in another era or in privileged households where Dad worked & Mom watched the kids -- hence they're not cognizant of the need. (Note: such "traditional" families now comprise less than 10% of all families.)
2. Absence of expressed employee demand. They may be afraid to admit childcare needs for fear of reprisals, dismissal or putting their careers at risk.

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CHILD CARE ASSISTANCE: WHAT THE WORKPLACE OFFERS

Bureau of Labor Statistics reports that of the estimated 1,128,000 US firms with 10 or more employees:

<u>10.1% offer childcare benefits</u>	<u>61.4% offer work/schedule assistance</u>
43% Information & Referral Svcs	71% Flextime
42% Counseling Services	70% Flexible Leave
30% Help with childcare expenses	58% Voluntary Part-time
16% Employer-sponsored day care	24% Job Sharing
	14% Work At Home

Note: Many offer more than one benefit or policy.



3. Assumption it's expensive. Many employers assume the answer is a costly on-site center -- when there's a host of simpler, less expensive options. Still, some employers worry these could open doors for demanding an on-site center.

Key Component Is Sensitive Managers Even those who have programs find some resistance. Idea strikes at the heart of ingrained "leave your personal problems at home" value system (long identified as a major managerial failing). "Even the most responsive family policy will not yield desired outcomes -- if the need for sensitivity has not been conveyed to mid-level managers or communicated thruout the culture," warns Dana Friedman, a Conference Board expert on childcare issues.

In addition to reinforcing policy, manager sensitivity is key for 2 other reasons: 1) Surveys of major org'ns that have as yet done nothing about childcare find it one of the things employees would value most; 2) Other surveys indicate the greatest predictor of work/family stress is an unsupportive supervisor. Hence, some firms are building programs into management training to make managers aware of family-related issues.

Bottom-Line Benefits Childcare makes economic sense by: 1) reducing absenteeism & tardiness, which cost money; 2) increasing morale, which makes money; 3) improving recruitment & retention, which saves money. Employee loyalty is a competitive advantage given predictions of coming labor shortage. Push for quality & customer satisfaction requires employee satisfaction: personnel worrying about their kids can't deliver it consistently no matter what.

Program Options Pioneering responses have come primarily from large org'ns in high growth industries (e.g. high tech) & service sector (banks, insurance, hospitals) -- typically female-intensive & non-union. Others are family-owned businesses or producers of family-oriented products & services.

1. Information & Referral. From simple hand-outs to video tours. Help employees find & evaluate community childcare services. Employers can compile their own list or contract with an org'n that lists facilities complete with costs, locations, hours, etc. Many opportunities here for public/private partnerships.

2. Financial Assistance. Most popular is dependent-care benefit plan. Allows employees to pay for childcare with pre-tax payroll deduction. Savings for both employee (taxed on fewer dollars) & employer (less FICA). "Cafeteria plan" allows choice from "menu" of benefits -- squelching complaints from employees who don't need childcare.

Other employers arrange discounts for childcare at local centers. Typically 10%, often matched by employer contributing additional 10%. Some offer vouchers subsidizing a portion of employees' cost.

3. Flexible Hours. Most popular is flextime. Especially important since most centers don't address problems of sick children, after-school "latchkey" care, 24-hour care (critical for parents who work nights, weekends, rotating shifts at airlines, hospitals, hotels, police/fire, etc). Others include work-at-home; job-sharing; parental leave for mothers or fathers.

4. On-Site or Nearby Facilities. Can be operated in a variety of ways: profit or nonprofit, internal or external management. Must a) have ample space including outdoor area; b) be away from any toxic use or manufacture.

5. Consortium or Collaborative Facilities. Vast majority of org'ns are too small to fill a center. It's unfeasible for multi-location employers. So several band together, often involving hospital or school to add professional guidance.

RESOURCES FOR CHILDCARE PROGRAMS

1. The Conference Board Work and Family Information Center, nat'l clearinghouse of research & info; excellent bibliography (Dana Friedman, sr research assoc, 845 Third Ave, NYC 10022; 212/759-0900).
2. Child Care Action Campaign provides technical advice, shares policies of both public & private orgn's, offers fact sheets, bi-monthly newsletter (Barbara Reisman, exec dir, 99 Hudson, Suite 1233, NYC 10013; 212/334-9595).
3. Bank Street College of Education offers free report, "Investing in Quality Childcare." New report, "Childcare & Productivity," available soon (Ellen Galinsky, proj dir, Work & Family Life Studies, Bank Street College, 610 W. 112th St, NYC 10025; 212/663-7200).

NEGOTIATING IS BASIC PR SKILL ...& GENDER MAKES A DIFFERENCE; HOW TO CAPITALIZE ON THIS

Are men or women better negotiators? Research by Carol Watson, Grad School of Management, Rutgers, shows the differences -- and how to use them:

1. Men exhibit more negative problem-solving behavior -- competitiveness & pressure tactics. They also exhibit more positive ones -- cooperativeness in seeking mutually satisfying outcomes. But these are often undermined by the negative behaviors.

\*Male-male negotiation pairs are the least likely to reach good outcomes.

2. Women are far less competitive than men, but no better at building good relations. One reason for women's lack of success is they often avoid conflict, to the point of not bringing up key issues. While women often feel they've negotiated successfully, an objective measure of outcomes didn't corroborate their feelings.

\*Female-female negotiations are no more successful than male-male.

3. \*Most successful negotiations were between a man & a woman.

Men felt more cooperative, enthusiastic & concerned about pleasing their partners rather than dominating. Women felt less cooperative, thus less likely to avoid issues than they did with women. If gender brings success, use it! (More info from GSM, Rutgers, 92 New St, Newark NJ 07102; 201/648-5366)