

## 1989 PRSA CONFERENCE REFLECTS MATURING OF PROFESSION: INTENSE, PERSONAL PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT EMPHASIS POSITIONING PR IN AREAS OF POLICY, HUMAN RESOURCES & MORE

No journalists were featured speakers. Instead a researcher (Bob Teeter), an international trade specialist (Clyde Prestowitz) & a pundit (Ben Wattenberg) gave highly divergent views of how the nation might go about "Creating Consensus from Diversity" -- the conference theme. The contradictions highlighted by their presentations suggest that achieving consensus is nowhere near. It fell to 50 seminars, 125 roundtables & a dozen section programs to provide the how-tos; & to incoming PRSA president Jerry Dalton to define pr's responsibilities in the new decade:

1. Globalization -- as effects of international stock markets & European common market in '92 intensify, "1 out of every 3 or 4 of us will make business trips during the next decade to the Soviet Union, China, the Pacific Rim, Middle East & Africa."
2. Advertising is weakening -- so pr will grow in importance to marketing.
3. Environmental demands -- packaging, pesticides, acid rain, global warming will bring big reforms, voluntarily & regulated. "Publics are fed up with institutions that pollute."
4. Massive sociopolitical issues -- infrastructure, education, healthcare costs, drugs, AIDS, the homeless & "have nots" all competing for the same scarce funds.
5. Full & equal acceptance for all citizens -- action, not more rhetoric!
6. Managing technology -- every 18 months the capacity of microchips doubles.

Prestowitz' address on reversing American decline earned a spontaneous standing ovation, and was videotaped. Practitioners can take lead in creating awareness of his timely message by showing this to management, also to chamber of commerce & similar groups. Interest in professional development was seen in full attendance at hands-on learning/sharing sessions -- and lively purchase of their audiotapes. (Order from PRSA.)



**CRISIS PLANNING HAS LESS TO DO WITH  
MEDIA TRAINING THAN POLICY & STRUCTURE**

"Effective crisis preparedness goes far beyond just media training," Bill Nielsen,

dir corp comn, Johnson & Johnson, told the conference. Preparedness has more to do with setting policy, knowing structure & building solid relationships, according to Nielsen's checklist of 9 key steps:

- 1) Start with top & look at policy, for instance, concern for public safety, honesty, etc. Nielsen cites J&J's credo as an primary example of policy -- i.e. who comes first (pr 2/14/83).
- 2) Require all incidents be reported to headquarters for immediate risk assessment. Decentralized management is fine, but when crisis is imminent, headquarters organization must make final determination.
- 3) In times of crisis, reorganize management as needed for complete control.
- 4) Local managers must be predisposed to accepting corporate intervention in a crisis.
- 5) Organization must have willingness & readiness to send people to the site of crisis. Nielsen tells of a recent incident where he and a corporate attorney caught the first plane to deal with an incident. Both were needed; the crisis plan had specifically addressed responsiveness.
- 6) Create a crisis task force and list of what needs to be done in every incident.
- 7) Assess the relationship between the legal dep't & public relations. "Teamwork is key at both crisis site and headquarters."
- 8) Have list of local pr firms at every potential crisis site (i.e. where plants exist, etc.) in case need immediate help.
- 9) Set up a contingency plan for every potential crisis. Look carefully at the situation, then test and train.

— PR PROFESSION —  
LACKS DIVERSITY

While minorities constitute 21% of current US workforce (expected to reach 30% by 2000), only 7% of practitioners are from minority groups, Bruce Crawley told PRSA Assembly on behalf of Minority Affairs Committee.

Should CEO be immediately visible at crisis site? Marion Pinsdorf, Graduate School of Business, Fordham U, says yes. Recent examples -- Exxon, Bhopal, etc. -- show that the lack or presence of CEO helps to assuage

public criticism. Carbide CEO Anderson went to Bhopal, Exxon's Rawls didn't visit Valdez. (Note recent media comments re Bush's non-presence in wake of Hurricane Hugo vs. next-day visit to Calif. quake site.)

Both Pinsdorf & Nielsen see practitioner's role as asking the tough questions, looking for what isn't being told by subordinates in times of crisis. Reports of potential crisis will be watered down as they move up the ladder. Practitioners must also learn to survey environment.

#### **MARKETING PR CAN OUTPERFORM ADVERTISING SAYS LONG-TIME COUNSELOR DAN EDELMAN**

"In the right circumstances, public relations can outperform market-

ing & be more effective in doing so." He points out the explosion of pr involvement in marketing is partially a result of changing & diversifying markets. Edelman identifies 10 areas in which pr can be more effective than marketing:

- 1) Introducing a revolutionary breakthru product. Marketing pr can start introductory sales at a much higher level of demand by creating more awareness of the product/service.
- 2) Generating new consumer excitement for an old product. Edelman described Swift's "Turkey Talk Line" which sought to increase limited turkey use, today is its primary marketing vehicle.
- 3) Eliminating trouble with distribution to retail outlets. Often the way to get shelf space is to have consumers demand the product. Marketing pr can be extremely effective in creating consumer demand.
- 4) Budgets are small and competition is giant. Often there is no other way of telling the story.
- 5) Consumers don't remember product. "Morris the cat" was one answer to consumer disinterest.
- 6) Product is great but complicated. Many products, their use & benefits are difficult to explain to mass audiences in a brief ad. Edelman cited pharmaceuticals as a key example.
- 7) Advertising is prohibited, or...
- 8) Can't be advertised on tv, i.e. alcohol, condoms, etc.

Distinguished Educator Award honoree Jim Grunig of U Maryland summarized some of his own & others' research for an afternoon roundtable. 1) There is a difference between a market & a public. Markets work from the top down, with products or services pushed thru. Publics work from the affected individual on up. 2) Marketing makes money, pr saves money.

- 9) Spotlighting reputational dimensions of the product -- looking for good will, emphasizing social responsibility, etc.
- 10) Major marketing crisis calls for fast action -- i.e. when overseas terrorism threatened to impact British Airways & tourism to Great Britain.

Sales support is one of three key responsibilities of public relations (pr 2/13). Since the 3 form a seamless web, practitioners must be cognizant of the benefits of participating in the marketing goals of the organization.

**EFFECTIVE COALITION-BUILDING  
CAN BE INVALUABLE TO YOUR ORGANIZATION**

"Since the '70s, public interest groups have been setting the national agenda,"

consultant Mary Ann Pires (Elmsford, NY) told conference attendees. She noted trends:

- ¶ Today's activists are more sophisticated than those of a decade or 2 ago.
- ¶ There has been a dramatic shift in business/activist relations since the mid 80s. According to Soc of Consumer Affairs Prof'ls study, 71% of the activist groups have working relationships with businesses.
- ¶ A new breed of CEOs understands value of issues anticipation. They spend 50% or more of their time on external relations.

Pires offers tips on how to build strong, effective coalitions:

1. Define Objectives. "Have clear goals in mind. Do your homework on prospect groups. Commit to long-term relationships."
2. Know Your Issues. Identify the stake others have in your issue -- what's in it for them? "Simplify your message, and speak with One Clear Voice."
3. Build Your Alliance. Commit to shared decision-making, and develop communication tools which lead to consensus. Divide the labor so coalition assumes its own identity. Follow up & insist on accountability.

RESEARCH STATUS IN PR

Introducing the keynote speaker, pollster Bob Teeter, Harold Burson gave a strong pitch for using more research -- but had to admit that even in his own megafirm, only 23 of 2300 employees are researchers.

4. Stay Flexible. Negotiate, be willing to compromise.
5. Treat Coalition Partners Decently. "Listen to the other side -- don't get so busy telling people why you're right that you don't hear them. Keep confidences."
6. Maintain Contacts. Keep in touch with allies after the goal is met. Expose your coalition contacts to more than one person in the organization & vice versa.
7. Measure Results. Early seeding is critical for when the issue surfaces. It's tougher to get people involved when an issue has already exploded.

**BIG CHANGES AHEAD FOR HEALTHCARE --  
PRACTITIONERS ADVISED TO KEEP HEADS UP**

The 90s hold several  
big changes for the  
healthcare industry --

changes so tumultuous that Frank Weaver, exec dir Dallas Medical Action predicts they will bring about a "white water revolution" in the field. He outlined for PRSA Health Section the impending issues which will change the face of the healthcare -- and provide pr opportunities:

1. Quality: "Consumers will demand & examine a) credentials; b) range of services available. Both of these can be communicated by pr. Also important to the consumer will be price, access, & accommodation. The outcome, as it relates to rate of infection, mortality, a productive lifestyle, will become the bottom line.
2. Service will be the distinguishing factor -- a natural for help from pr.
3. Communicating quality care, thru establishment of "center of excellence" hospitals, setting parameters that help institutions meet standards, etc.
4. Standards will be set. PR can be instrumental in developing them via research of patient satisfaction. "Consumers will be looking for an organization's stability."
5. Cost Shifting, Government Cuts: "It's more than a medical problem -- it's a social problem." More funding is needed for Medicare, Medicaid. "This is a major opportunity for practitioners to establish a USP for their healthcare institution and take the lead on an active patient relations program."
6. Preventive Medicine will finally establish itself.
7. Selective Contracting For Services will be a 90s trend. "We're drifting toward the privatization of healthcare." This means competition, maybe confusion -- and pr can create understanding.

## PRSA ASSEMBLY EXPANDS PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT OFFERINGS

¶ Maintenance of Accreditation Plan Passed; requires accredited members to earn 10 points every 3 years, beginning 1991. At least 3 points must be in education category (college courses, seminars, home study etc). Other categories are professional service (speaking, writing, teaching, work in professional societies) and community service. Plan has been debated thruout the year, amended in response, reported Continuing Education Board chair Anna West.

Main objection raised was that system should count only education. It proved unpersuasive against argument pr is an applied science, so chairing committees & serving community organizations are in fact professional development. Other opposition was minimal, divided between those who say plan is too weak, others who say too stringent. 1990 is to be an "education year" to acquaint those affected with the details of complying. Move coincided with 25th anniversary of accreditation program, denoted at conference by ribbon on badges of APRs.

¶ Orders For Body Of Knowledge Abstracts were being taken at the conference. They cover 889 entries, will be available shortly in both print & computer disc. 40 educators & graduate students wrote the abstracts, supervised by Dr. Bob Kendall & Prof. Jim Anderson of U Florida. BOK will be continually updated by the 8-member BOK Board & its subject matter task forces, chaired by George Fowler of Colorado State. Every 3 years deletions will be made to remove outdated material. (BOK Abstracts available in binder for \$75/\$50 -- non/members -- or on computer diskettes for \$65/\$40 from PRSA, 33 Irving Place, NYC 10003.)

¶ Charter Members Of PRSA College Of Fellows were inducted. All 26 are Gold Anvil winners. They constitute a core to decide on final criteria for admitting others. Chet Burger will chair College. Admission is not honorific but open to all who qualify -- the final step in professional progression.

## WHO'S WHO IN PUBLIC RELATIONS

**ELECTED.** PRSA 1990 officers: pres, Jerry Dalton (mgr corp comn, LTV, Dallas); pres-elect, Joe Epley (pres Epley & Assoc, Charlotte); sec'y, Rosalee Roberts (vp Bozell, Omaha); treas, Harriet Gonzalez (dir comn, GTE Telephone, Irving, Texas).

**PRSA dirs-at-large:** Bruce Pozzi (Anchorage); Catherine Ahles (vp college rels, Macomb Community College, Warren, Mich); Gary Conwell

(vp mktg, Providence Memorial Hospital, El Paso); Dana Huges (PR Counselors, Marblehead, Mass).

**HONORED.** Pathfinder Award to Larissa Grunig, U of Maryland educator & researcher, for best scholarly pr research completed or published in past 2 years. Founded & initially funded by Allen Center, award is made by Institute for PR Res. & Educ.