

BLUELIGHTS CAMPAIGN IS SIMPLE BUT POWERFUL GRASSROOTS EFFORT, TRULY INVOLVING PARTICIPANTS

Those concerned about the AIDS epidemic, or about people who have the disease, place a blue light in the window. Blue lights now signify STOP AIDS, say campaign organizers. Like MADD's red ribbon project (pr 1/15/90), idea is to a) provide visual reinforcer of AIDS problem, b) make blue lights pandemic -- all cities, all streets, c) give supporters something they personally can do.

Goal is to motivate elected officials, neighbors, passers-by, thru this show of public support, to 1) provide research & patient care funding, 2) stop bigotry against victims, 3) take personal steps to avoid spreading AIDS. Seattle, Portland, Denver, Chicago, LA, San Diego, Orlando, Dallas, Atlanta, NYC, Boston & DC are currently participating, with others joining regularly.

Primary method of urging people to participate in the no-budget effort is letters to the editor. Readers are urged to make copies & pass them on to friends & family.

The founder, David Willers of San Francisco, says he got the idea from an effort years ago to get the gov't to do something to stop polio. People would leave their porch lights on from 7 'til 10. He chose blue lights because it is a loving color, and is used for such helpful things as emergency entrances at hospitals, landing lights for aircraft, to signify safe harbors during his Vietnam War experience. He kicked off the campaign last October after his twin brother died of AIDS.

IS ENVIRONMENTAL CONCERN OLD PROBLEM OF IGNORING SCIENCE FOR PERCEPTION?

Calif's "Green" initiative is described by Bobbie Metzger, well known Sacramento pa expert (Stoorza, Ziegau & Metzger) as "draconian" -- to the extent it could fail for going too far. TV commercials featuring several celebs -- Michael Landon, Jamie Lee Curtis, Jane Fonda -- are all-out emotional appeals, aimed primarily at denigrating what "experts" & gov't say about pollution not being at crisis point.

Is this another case of "eminent Hollywood toxicologists" ignoring scientific findings, as in the Alar scare? Asbestos, feared as a killer in the walls, especially at schools, is now found to be not that at all. Science magazine ran an editorial proclaiming its danger "harmlessly small," adding EPA damaged its credibility by not adequately refining its asbestos standards. Michigan's legislature is considering a bill to forbid removing asbestos in most cases.

But how can science be packaged to overcome public perception?

"Like 'tying a yellow ribbon 'round the old oak tree,' you, too, can show your concern & support for bringing about changes in attitudes towards those already infected with the AIDS virus, and the search for a cure." (From letter-to-editor being used to broaden campaign.)

Vol.33 No.31
August 6, 1990

"PUBLIC RELATIONS TODAY IS A MORE VITAL COMPONENT IN MANAGEMENT THAN IT HAS EVER BEEN." LARRY FOSTER TELLS HOW TO KEEP IT THERE, AS HE RETIRES FROM JOHNSON & JOHNSON

"And its importance keeps growing," Foster told prr. After 33 years leading J&J's public relations, he retired Aug 1 -- to become an independent counselor (Westfield, NJ). Some thoughts from this esteemed pro:

PR's IMPORTANCE "CEOs have come to realize there are many hidden public relations factors in the decisions they make. Public relations' importance is evidenced by the manner in which pr professionals are used in the decisionmaking process. The highest level pros are finding themselves in the midst of making board room decisions. And that's exactly where they should be."

THE PROFESSION "Public relations has grown in importance, scope & complexity, and continues to do so. 30 years ago we were judged by our ability to write a press release & to understand how the media functioned. Today we must know all aspects of the industry we're in & our company or organization & public relations strategy. It's becoming extremely complex."

MOST DIFFICULT CHALLENGE "Many would guess Tylenol. But I don't look at it that way. I helped create the first pr department for Johnson & Johnson. Sustaining & building J&J's reputation over 3 decades & maintaining an extremely competent staff was more of a challenge than Tylenol. Once we learned J&J's management philosophy, Tylenol decisions fell in line. Tylenol was the most physically taxing -- for the first 6 months our lives were a blur of activity. But in terms of what I look back on with the greatest pride of accomplishment, it's that I helped create J&J's first pr dep't when it was a \$250 million company, helped put in place its philosophy of pr -- then watched it grow 40 times to become the \$10 billion company it is today."

"I grew up wanting to be a successful journalist. My move to pr, after 9 years as a journalist, was done with a great deal of misgivings, wondering whether leaving journalism was a mistake. In retrospect, it was clearly a superb decision because I was part of the growth of public relations in a well run company -- where appreciation for what pr can do to help a company grow & succeed is realized."

LESSONS LEARNED "The most valuable was to not make snap judgments -- get all the facts first. The second most valuable lesson I learned was to go with my instincts. As a result of doing this, 4 chairmen sought my advice & judgment. That helps add to your value."

PR EDUCATION "I worry about people who are taking the curriculum in public relations. The best education is a sound liberal arts program with a strong background in business & political science. Later on when these students begin dealing with senior level people they're going to have to know how to talk the same language. Time could be better spent getting a broad based education. PR people have to be generalists because they get thrown into so many different situations."

"THERE'S NO EASY ROUTE TO THE TOP First you must develop your judgment, knowledge of pr & your writing ability. Being able to put words together in a persuasive & meaningful way is a fundamental necessity. Then, get to know the business you're in and the people who manage it. Develop in them a sense of confidence in your judgment & ability to contribute to the major decisions. The rest is up to you."

Now, J&J's corp pr dep't is in the hands of Bill Neilsen -- "an outstanding pr pro." He spent 17 yrs with Carl Byoir as exec vp. Went with Hill & Knowlton when it acquired Byoir, as sr vp. With Foster at J&J for 2 1/2 yrs. Neilsen's latest role was vp comms; now is vp corp pr.

CANADA'S 7% TAX ON GOODS & SERVICES (GST) WON'T HARM PR FIRMS, UNLIKE STATE PROPOSALS

To begin Jan 1, GST is a "flow thru situation. We're

not going to find our budgets reduced by 7%. A lot of people are concerned it'll create an increase in prices -- but the consulting community feels fairly comfortable now that it won't affect us dramatically," Jane Langdon, presiding ofcr of CPRS' Consultants' Institute, told prr. GST replaces Canada's present 13.5% sales tax.

"I don't think the GST will harm pr firms," Sal Badali of Peat Marwick Thorne (Toronto) told prr. He gives this illustration: If Company A buys a service from Company B and agrees to pay \$100, B will charge \$107 -- \$7 being the GST. But A is entitled to claim that \$7 back from the gov't -- an input tax credit. And when A sells its products/services, it'll bill its customers the fee plus the GST. So it's claiming back the 7% all the

"People who choose pr today are making a sound career decision. But it's a very demanding profession requiring the highest level of knowledge & skills. It's not an easy career. But it's a fascinating one. I've never had a 9-5 day all the years I've been working because when you're helping to run the pr of a major corporation, you're on call 24 hours. If you really want to go to the top -- and there's plenty of room there -- then go at it with the knowledge that you're going to have to make major & substantial contributions. Then expect to be rewarded well."

way along the line. It's a value added tax, similar to Europe & New Zealand. It's not a tax on business; it's a tax on consumption because consumers can't claim input tax credits.

If goods cross the border into Canada, there will be a 7% GST added. But imported services won't attract GST in Canada. US pr consultants won't have to charge Canadian clients the GST. Likewise, Canadian firms selling consulting services to American companies won't charge GST because that's considered an export.

That tax issues are swirling around pr services everywhere suggests sooner or later some clever legislator is going to figure a way to levy a tax. Does pr's rising visibility & importance make it a target? Would the tax folks back off if they really understood pr's social purpose?

ITEMS OF IMPORTANCE TO PROFESSIONALS

"Does OD Stand For Ostentatious Designations...or is it a very useful technique for practitioners? One subscriber joshed us with the former after a recent mention of OD (organization development). The same mail brought a case study on introduction of the designated driver concept -- which Marshall Fenn Ltd (Toronto) originally did for Canadian Club with great success. Before the program could begin, however, "we took 6 months to get the full support of the police, MADD, PRIDE, bars, taverns, hotels & every group that had a vested interest in the use & abuse of beverage alcohol." You can be sure OD techniques were used in this effort, whether or not anyone called them by that name. The law of OD was applied: involvement leads to commitment -- an aspect often overlooked in pr programs.

"Stimulating Meeting Attenders is cleverly done by a name tent designed by the Southeast Region of US Forest Service. Participant's name is printed as usual on the front, facing the group. But on the back, facing the participant, is this: "ARE YOU: -- Participating & contributing? -- Sticking to the subject? -- Asking questions when confused? -- Listening & respecting the reactions of others? -- Helping others as needed? -- Letting us know how we are doing? Then you are doing your part to make this session a success!"

"What Does Demise Of Well Known Magazines Signify? Certainly not that society is less fragmented into interest groupings. Landmark publications including Psychology Today, Manhattan inc, Ms., even the distinguished journal Yale Review have folded. Along with Long Island Monthly, Southpoint (formerly Southern), 7 Days & others. Most are locals regionals, which may tell something about a) too much to read, b) the massive packages daily & Sunday newspapers now provide. Another culprit: the near impossibility of getting subscriptions (or any other response) by mail in today's 3rd class blizzard. By the way, are your target audiences really reading your publications...& can you prove it?