

practitioner has the best experience for the job, but your Japanese client asks for a man to handle the account?

6. **Controversial/unpopular clients** -- when is it right, or wrong, to turn down business? Harold Burson says there are 4 factors that impact this decision: a) personal values; b) can we actually help this client?; c) is it in the public interest?; and d) is it good business judgment (will this damage the firm with clients, employees or prospects)? (NOTE: this comes from Paluszek interviewing him for PRSA Foundation's in-progress film archives, available soon)

Paluszek says many of these situations are described in John Budd's 1991 ethics paper presented to IPRA. (Copy from Budd, Omega Group, 31 1/2 East 38th St, NYC 10016)

#### ELEMENTS OF A SUCCESSFUL ETHICS PROGRAM

- ¶ A written code
- ¶ Employee commitment
- ¶ Employee training
- ¶ Vendor participation and training
- ¶ Discipline processes which are used
- ¶ Disclosure
- ¶ Ongoing education & expectation building
- ¶ Frequent interpretation of the organization's activities within the context of ethics & desired behaviors
- ¶ Top management participation & leadership in the process

#### TIPS FOR PRESS RELEASE EFFECTIVENESS; NEW RESEARCH SAYS AVOID MAILING THEM

Lynn Walters' (Texas A&M) top research paper presented at conference suggests determinants of press release coverage by daily newspapers. Key findings:

- ¶ Wire service coverage (not press releases) is the most significant determinant of whether or not a story is picked up by the media. Findings suggest it adds legitimacy.
- ¶ Releases are **less likely to be placed if they are sent by mail** -- with the exception of very technical articles (which may need further investigation by reporter) or feature stories that are not timebound.
- ¶ Larger & smaller papers use releases more often than mid-size papers. Small papers because of lack of staff, large papers have space to fill.
- ¶ A summary sheet (about 50 words, alerts reporters to story) is only marginally important.
- ¶ Obviously, the timeliness of the topic correlates to the speed of placement. Stories are more likely to be used within 3 days if topic is timely.

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603/778-0514 Fax: 603/778-1741

#### DISINFORMATION: OK FOR MILITARY? OR DISHONEST IN ALL CASES? DEFINING DISINFORMATION SUGGESTS OTHERS ALSO PRACTICE IT

"There is **practically** no occasion for a corporation to risk its reputation by distributing disinformation," says one panelist at PRSA's lively conference workshop on "The Ethics of Disinformation." "**In peace time** there is no time to lie," says another. Neither panelists nor their audience could agree whether there is an "ethical" time to use disinformation.

Since military propaganda is the admitted example, it was used as the case in point. But while the panel talked, new federal regulation was announced that suggests disinformation -- or something close to it -- is **widely practiced in the food industry**. FDA rules to implement Nutrition Labeling & Education Act imply "low calorie" doesn't necessarily mean that; serving sizes on labels are sometimes set ridiculously small to mask the real cholesterol or sugar count; and what's the true difference between "lean" & "extra lean" meat? Congress had to step in to stop this charade.

**ON ONE HAND...BUT** Capt. Mike Sherman, Navy Ofc of Info, insists "there is nothing ethical, moral or correct about deceiving or lying to the media or the public." Houston counselor Guy Brown, former military PAO, advocates to clients a policy of "complete disclosure." Jerry Dalton reminds us that members of professional societies are bound by codes of ethics which prohibit this very activity. (Not to pick on them, but did ethical practitioners inside the food industry question less-than-honest labeling?)

But disinformation by the military is an accepted & well-known activity, validated by the "need to save lives" & win the war. The dichotomy prompted Alexander Borisov, pres. of Russia's fledgling pr society, to ask a question that is ironic considering its source, but flashingly indicative of change: "**Is the title of this panel an oxymoron?**"

No accepted comparable circumstances in civilian life were cited by panelists or audience. But **is "making a profit" or "getting the law passed" equivalent in some minds to "winning the battle"?** The admitting "I'm not naive enough to say no organization deals in disinformation," Dalton believes any

"As a public relations professional, **to whom am I ultimately responsible -- my employer or its publics?** What is my duty to keep my organization straight & how do I do that? What is my duty to disclose? What is your right to know? If I tell some, but not all, is that ok? How much is enough? Is a half-truth a half-lie? If I remain silent, am I lying to you?" -- Cleveland counselor Davis Young, PRSA conference chair



EDITOR, PATRICK JACKSON • PUBLISHER, OTTO LERBINGER • ASSOCIATE EDITOR, JUNE BARBER  
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organization which does must be in "serious trouble if it is willing to lie."

**DOES PSYOPS v. PUBLIC AFFAIRS EQUAL MANAGEMENT v. PR?**

Is disinfo ethical when practitioners are not aware of the facts or involved in their release? Military disinformation emanates from Psychological Operations (PSYOPS). Sherman explains Public Affairs' practice is to disassociate from & ignore activities by this organization -- in essence, as long as the right hand doesn't know what the left hand is doing, it won't impact it. Could, say, a hospital dpr adopt this stance?

Counselor Bruce Crawley describes a corporate situation where a unit issued a report which, upon careful checking by pr, proved misleading. Organizational change was affected because of it -- but pr said halt.

- QUESTIONS RAISED BUT NOT ANSWERED**
- 1) Does ignorance guarantee innocence?
  - 2) Should pr/pa be charged with rooting out inaccuracy & therefore avoid distributing disinformation?
  - 3) Is there ever a good reason -- saving lives or making a profit -- to engage in disinformation?

**EXAMPLES OF MILITARY DILEMMA**

1) How to maintain public credibility when PSYOPS deliberately put out a story of 5 Iraqi helicopters surrendering to Desert Storm? Sherman: "PSYOPS has a chillingly efficient apparatus of conveying (dis)information thru the media to all sources."

2) Media military analysts convince themselves attack on Kuwait will be amphibious. Will media scapegoat PA for their own experts' wrong predictions?

Media & public may accept the politics of disinformation during wartime but will this consent be transformed into **cynicism about peacetime information**? Will it, in the words of the Uniform PR Code of Ethics, "undermine the channels of information"? Private organizations are fortunate to be spared the necessity of living within the military world of double standards -- or do they?

**ETHICAL DILEMMAS IN COUNSELING FIRM PRACTICE OFTEN PIT PROFESSIONALISM v. PLEASED CLIENT**

little, if anything, & charge the client \$60 an hour? Okay to tell a client article placement will cost \$2,000 for time, then charge \$25,000

Is it morally correct to pay interns very

) ) when the story gets in & has wildly successful results? It's legal, but raises an **ethical dilemma**.

"An ethical dilemma faces one with two choices, both undesirable," finds counselor Jim Lukaszewski (White Plains, NY). An ethical dilemma is **unclear**. Laws are not ethical dilemmas because the choice is clear: breaking the law is wrong. "Ethics are mostly common sense."

Counselors Academy discussion paper, "Confronting Ethical Dilemmas: Installing a Step-By-Step Approach to Your Practice," cites these steps to resolving them:

1. **Encourage Questions** -- First step in approaching ethical dilemmas. *In an environment of ethical behavior, no important question goes unasked or, more importantly, remains unanswered.*
2. **Identify the Choices** -- Tough questions present tough choices.
3. **Identify Appropriate Behaviors** -- Finding ways to cope with behaviors that are unacceptable in the eyes of the public, peers or gov't results from identifying issues, then developing approaches, & codifying the most appropriate behaviors.

(Copy of discussion paper or Ethical Dilemmas Workbook #1 from Jill Weiner at 212/995-2230)

**HOW DO YOU KNOW IT'S THE RIGHT THING TO DO?**

In addition to 1) **PRSA Code of Ethics**, Ketchum 2) puts employees thru an **ethics course** & 3) asks them to reflect on ethics at annual **performance reviews**, reports pres. John Paluszek. Some common ethical situations he shared in a conference workshop:

1. **Bait & switch** -- have you ever pitched a new account with senior counsel, expecting that junior counsel will do the majority of the work?
2. **Selling the sizzle, not the steak** -- while we may not go so far as to make actual promises, how often do we sneak in subtle references?
3. **Counsel or conform?** -- do you give in to a client's demands even tho you disagree professionally? [When you know his solution won't work?]
4. **Client caveat emptor** -- is it right to accept assignments that you know from the beginning are undoable? [Or ineffective, a waste of resources?]
5. **Culture clash & account staffing** -- e.g. what do you do when a female