

View is understandably that of the media -- calling the position "public information officer" & concentrating on press relations. But the advice is sounder for its source: "Public information officers are extraordinarily important people in any organization ... but not for papering the world with press releases. The best PIOs rarely, if ever, write a press release." Editorial goes on to list the valuable ways pr makes organizations more effective. Nancy Killoran of U Alaska-Anchorage says this is illustrative of the way pr pros have developed in the 49th State. (Copy from prr)

¶ **Practical Guide For Organizational Ethics & Compliance** is new Corporate Conduct Quarterly. Inaugural issue says it will deal with "one of today's most pressing concerns, improvement in the day-to-day behavior of business & its leaders." Articles cover the compliance audit, developing compliance education in biz schools ("it may be time to develop a new type of professional -- a certified compliance officer"), legal audits, pollution prevention v. pollution control. (\$50/yr, 401 Cooper st., Camden, NJ 08102)

¶ **Procter & Gamble's recent attempt to silence current & former employees** is an internal version of the SLAPP suit (see prr 12/18/89). Tho P&G didn't sue, its pursuit of employee(s) who leaked "sensitive company information" to the Wall Street Journal will have the same effect. SLAPPs (Strategic Lawsuits Against Public Participation) are a threat to the First Amendment; most common are developers SLAPPING activist groups. Cases are rarely decided in favor of the plaintiff but do succeed in tying up the opposition, silencing them for a time, and intimidating would-be opponents, explains Timothy Coombs in his paper on the subject presented to AEJMC (copy from prr). While P&G's attempt (in a twisted way) may have been to reinforce loyalty to the company (by controlling unauthorized info flow), is this the way to get it? Will such threats work?

¶ **PR Is for Everyone Today: Highly Publicized Murder Accomplice Pam Smart** is supported in her appeal for retrial by an activist group, FRIENDS of Pamela Smart -- which publishes a newsletter (on lavender paper) to take her case to the public. With several books & movies planned on the conspiracy murder of her husband, Smart has never been out of the news since her indictment last year. Editors prefer to remain anonymous, but latest issue includes signed letters & personal photos. Cover of each issue features Smart's picture and a letter from her to the readers. Somehow, a photo of Smart & 3 of her friends was taken in prison & given to newspapers last week, as part of related media campaign. Cookouts & sale of "Pamela's Song" raise funds for her legal fees.

WHO'S WHO IN PUBLIC RELATIONS

PEOPLE. Sunshine Janda Overkamp (sr vp, United Way of America, Alexandria, Va) receives the Clairol Mentor Award for public service. It

is the only national corporate-sponsored mentoring program for women.

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PR'S CURRENT CONUNDRUM ILLUSTRATED BY SASKATCHEWAN UTILITY: MANAGERS WANT PUBLIC PARTICIPATION -- BUT DO THEY UNDERSTAND PEOPLE EXPECT SOMETHING WILL COME OF IT, THAT THEY'LL BE HEARD?

SaskPower is trying hard to involve customers & stakeholders in a critical decision: energy options for the 21st century. "We've been working on the details of our **energy options program** since February 1990, when our president opened the door just a crack and we started proposing approaches and building a team," Bob Rempel, dir corp comms, explains.

THE RISK A 5-member, widely-representative review panel is to summarize views & suggestions from the public so its input can become an integral part of planning. "Panel was not asked to recommend the next energy option. This was made clear to them & the public. But one wonders whether we will be boxed in when its report arrives. If nothing else, **will public opinion force us** to follow much of what the panel reports to us."

THE ADVANTAGE "If we fail to involve the public fully, it could leave us open to attack, forcing us to devote time, effort & energy defending ourselves, instead of getting on with the job of continuing to serve the needs of our customers.... But remember, you are in fact **creating a process to dialogue with interest groups.**"

PR OBJECTIVES 1) Be more **accountable** with customers, in reality & perception; 2) **Change corporate culture** re the appropriate source for policy influence (i.e., public & stakeholders rather than internal interests supported by long-standing practice) and then get in step with their wishes; 3) Enter into a **mutual education** process; 4) Achieve part of what an ongoing regulatory body does & in this way show there is no reason for one in Saskatchewan; 5) Make demand side management & other soft energy sources more acceptable within the internal culture.

YOU HAVE NO CHOICE

To build public relationships, & earn trust, there must be honest **involvement.**

But involvement raises **expectations** that the organization will listen to its publics.

Unless the corporate culture is ready for power sharing, involvement is a **risk.**

BUT today, **not** using involvement sends a damaging message: that the organization "knows best" & doesn't want to listen.



REVIEW PANEL "We structured it so members could act as individuals at arm's length from SaskPower. We wanted members to hear, interpret & convey to us the collective views of the people." Members a) had to be seen as an "unbiased third party," b) have technical expertise, c) be balanced geographically, d) represent women & the native community, and, as this was an election year, they had to e) transcend politics so their report could survive even if there were a change of gov't. "Panel members will really be challenged in writing their report. They represent widely differing points of view and will have to **come to concensus.**"

As a balance to input thru the panel: "We continue to monitor public opinion regarding energy sources on a regular basis through attitude surveys and now have data going back to March of last year."

KICKOFF Intent to consult the public was announced in a speech by SP's president at a special event to begin construction of a greenhouse connected to Shand Power Station -- another new era technique.

COMMUNICATIONS Last fall, a booklet -- "Our Future Generation: Electricity For Tomorrow" -- was widely distributed as a basis for discussion. It looks at upcoming power demands, outlines available options, reviews economic, social & environmental implications associated with each option. Its aim: to inform & encourage people to come out & make presentations or send their views to the panel. 15,000 have been distributed.

Advertising in weeklies & dailies announced the process, offering the booklet, introducing the panel, describing the various energy sources & inviting people to ask for more info. Drew nearly 1000 responses.

Other awareness efforts used posters, panel appearances on radio & tv, bill stuffer. Schools were targeted with educational materials.

Employees received all material provided to the public. Also regular info on the process & the various options via the employee publication. A video described the issues & the process. "They were not discouraged from making their own presentations, and some have. This is an area where you could **conjure up public relations disasters**, however."

Of 530 calls received via a toll free number during program's first phase: 473 requested 1332 booklets; 57 indicated a desire to present briefs. **Media effectiveness index:** 65% called because of info in the bill stuffer; 20% from newspaper ads; 13% from other sources.

PR's LEADERSHIP ROLE ¶ "As the panel was established & began functioning, our involvement & the involvement of many other groups within the organization diminished greatly. While cutting the umbilical cord was difficult at times, it was the right thing to do."

¶ "Public relations people can take heart in that we were a driving force behind this process. The corporation is changing and the process

holds out considerable promise for continued change **toward a participative corporate culture.**"

¶ "Be prepared for much internal debate and significant difference of opinion. This is indeed a threatening process for many."

MANAGEMENT CONSULTANTS HANDCUFF INSURANCE COMPANIES BY DOWNGRADING PR JUST WHEN THEY NEED IT MOST

Some observers feel biz school training is the biggest disaster ever to hit Corporate America --

and almost all agree its major blight is inflicted by management consulting firms. Here's a case study on this point:

"The insurance industry today has a horrible image problem that's difficult to solve because there are so many public groups against us. And we're facing negative legislation. There are bills in congress that could put us under federal control, or even dual federal & state regulations. For a while the industry hung together, but now some splintering is beginning. Some associations say we should compromise; others say no," Bob Benjamin, vp-pr of Indiana Farmers told pr.

"Consultants are downsizing public relations' influence without really understanding its importance. **Who's educating the consultants?**"

Within the industry, property & casualty companies are experiencing another difficulty -- increasing costs. Losses from storms, hurricanes, auto accidents ("which are worsening"), home fires & accidents are taking their toll. "The trend is to bring in outside management consultants to streamline the company, get more efficient."

Benjamin's company brought in a consultant who proposed a new mgmt chart. Originally Benjamin reported to the CEO, had direct influence on policy & decisionmaking. New organizational chart, which was accepted without any input from Benjamin, established a new COO under the president; placed marketing directly under the COO. **Public relations reports to marketing.** But the problem is in the issues arena, not sales.

When Benjamin asked how he could take pr out of policy/decisionmaking, CEO replied: "Well, the consultant recommended it **because that's the way it's done in other insurance companies**" (signifying the consultant didn't know enough to make an independent decision). Which further exacerbates (or explains?) the industry's relationship problems. Benjamin knows of a couple insurance companies in Iowa that have phased out their publications because consultants recommended it.

ITEMS OF INTEREST TO PRACTITIONERS

¶ **Alaska Daily States Case For PR At The Top Of The Organization.** Juneau Empire editorialized recently that practitioners "need to be in on the highest level of decision-making" and **"need to have a say in policy."**