

- **Info too big.** Wanting to use up the whole page, some organizations overcompensate by using big boxy bold type to mark out spaces for sender & receiver info. A wasteful use of space & can even slow down transmission time.
- **Ugly.** Designing forms is a specialty. Frequently fax cover sheets are designed hurriedly by a user, not a designer.
- **Bureaucratic.** Confusing words are used, eg, "transmission origination," "disposition of original," "intended for use by entity named above," "instructions for original."
- **Silly.** Organizations spend tens of thousands of dollars on design & production of professional letterhead to represent their visual image in the marketplace. Does it make sense for their fax cover sheets to sport junky clip art? Clocks with wings? Cartoon figures? Thermometers?

Sometimes a full-page cover sheet is necessary: a) when you have special directions for distribution that the fax operator needs to follow, separate from the document itself; b) when you want an extra layer of confidentiality. Most often tho, a full sheet isn't needed. A preprinted post-it note with space to write distribution directions & number of pages sent adhered to the front page will do the job. (3M has a self-interest 'cuz they make the post-its -- but their points make sense).

## ITEMS OF IMPORTANCE TO PROFESSIONALS

¶ **BELL ATLANTIC CEO'S RECIPE FOR ORGANIZATIONAL SUCCESS**, from an interview after industry-altering merger announcement with TCI: "Look at the company like it is a **grassroots political campaign**. People in the company should act like precinct captains & ward leaders and campaign for a cause." Think what that implies for 1-on-1 personalized relationship-building -- which the CEO, Ray Smith, reportedly led Bell of Pennsylvania to undertake years ago. Example: videos of simulated helpful & harmful "ambassador" behavior by employees in social settings, used as training tools. Compare school principals' ass'n advice to members that they must become skillful in politics in their communities (pr 11/16/92).

¶ **RADIO MEDIA TOUR HANDBOOK, AVAILABLE FREE**, are the equivalent of tv's satellite media tours -- numerous interviews in a short time (2-5 hrs) from one location. Guide explains how they work, answers questions such as, *do they require an angle?, where do they take place?, are they live or taped?, what happens during a tour?, can they be conducted in Spanish?* (Copy from North American Network, 7910 Woodmont av, Bethesda, Md 20814; 301/654-9810; fax 301/654-9828)

Also includes **10 tips for radio interviews**, e.g. "Help the listener by using repetition, outlining (there are 3 major points...first, second, third), summaries, examples & levity, as appropriate. Steer away from jokes, personal opinions & excessive use of statistics."

## STUDY CONFIRMS CLASSIC (BUT OFTEN IGNORED) RESEARCH: PEERS & OPINION LEADERS, NOT MEDIA & POLITICIANS, DRIVE DECISIONS

Relationships. That's the process thru which individuals form opinions about issues, finds a new study by the Kettering Foundation.

**WHAT DOESN'T WORK** 1) Publicity. The old "tell & sell." Nor do such methods as: 2) Presenting the facts; 3) Breaking the issue down into manageable bits; 4) Stimulating choice between 2 sides by bringing on experts (whether larger-than-life role models, national figures or prominent local authorities).

**These methods treat people as passive consumers of information.** Kettering study shows this pushes people away from public debate. It asks them to consider public concerns in ways that hold little meaning for them.

**WHAT WORKS** "People learn primarily thru their interactions with other people. The public teaches itself thru an interactive dialogue, not a debate -- a dialogue that is exploratory & deliberative with people testing their ideas rather than taking positions & trying to score points against some opponent. This dialogue is full of emotion because it is grounded in often painful personal experiences; yet it doesn't have the acrimony or ideological tilt of partisan debate."

Study calls the forming of relationships *meaningful chaos*. *Chaos* suggests the seemingly random interplay that occurs among the 9 key factors that go into building relationships (see below). **A linear step-by-step approach won't work.** At any single moment, any factor may act on its own, but when viewed as a whole, all factors play thruout the process.

## THE 9 PIVOTAL FACTORS & SOME KEY IMPLICATIONS

1. **People want to make connections between issues.** This gives a truer picture of how they experience these concerns in their daily lives -- e.g. linking the economy with the environment; the lack of a family unit with poverty, unemployment & crime. A key is capturing the language people use to describe their concerns -- e.g. verbatims from research may be more valuable than statistics.
2. **The lens thru which people view issues is personal context.** Self interest has been the conventional approach. But it goes beyond "what's in



it for me?" to what's meaningful or imaginable in their lives -- what resonates within the realm of possibility to them.

3. **People want coherent info, the whole story -- which they feel often eludes them.** They want the "hows" & "whys" & to understand all sides. Notes one commentator, "People are seeking insights, patterns, explanations & memories that, in fact, run counter to the fragmentation of information that so often is found in society today."
4. **People want room for ambivalence** -- a gray area where they can question, discuss, test ideas, gain confidence about their views.
5. **The presence of emotion -- including fear, anger, sadness, happiness -- is essential if people are to form & sustain relationships with public concerns.** The present "rational" approach is irrational to many. The challenge is to avoid stripping away emotion in attempts to bring order from chaos.
6. **Facts are unimportant: people are looking for authenticity when measuring whether a statement is true or credible.** The information & the individuals delivering it must "ring true." This means understanding what is authentic from citizens' perspectives, not just experts, technicians & elites. People look for guidance from their family, neighbors, co-workers, others close to them -- not media, pols & activists.
7. **People want positives, not negatives -- a "sense of possibility"** that things can get done & they can play a role. This suggests a move from presenting "bad news" (which paralyzes) to "good news" -- injecting a sense of movement & hope.
8. **Media, politicians, special interests have only limited roles (as Diffusion Process & other data have long held).** The "catalysts" -- those who help people form relationships with public concerns -- are everyday people, not the "experts," "officials" or "elites" we often think drive decisions. Identifying the catalysts, then incorporating them as beacons of info & influence, is in line with pr's strong push toward 1-on-1 & opinion leader projects (pr 9/27).
9. **People come together to talk & act on public concerns in little-noticed meeting places -- churches, synagogues, neighborhood councils, schools** (and, of course, cocktail parties, around the water cooler, at the dinner table). In our increasingly fragmented society, we need these **mediating institutions.**

Study suggests implications for applying each factor to programs. Methodology included 6 focus groups held around the country, and interviews with 13 "experts" asking for their comments on the hypotheses emerging from these focus groups. (Copy of study, "Meaningful Chaos," from Kettering Foundation, 200 Commons Rd, Dayton 45459-2799; 513/434-7300)

## SELF-APPOINTED WATCHDOG OF PR HAS SOME GROWL

John Stauber, longtime public interest activist, recently started his newsletter, PR Watch, out of frustration. "I worked on the BGH (bovine growth hormone) issue as a consultant to farm & consumer groups and became

annoyed at the underhanded tactics used by some of the pr firms."

His hope is to accelerate a debate within pr over ethical issues, he told prr. "Is it ethical for a pr firm to set up a phoney consumer group & go to meetings claiming to be citizen activists -- when in fact they're gathering information for clients?" He notes activists & journalists want the info he's collecting. "They need to know who these firms are, what their tactics are, who their clients are, because they're being approached & manipulated."

### SEES PUBLIC AFFAIRS AS REAL TROUBLE SPOT

He feels the newsletter

will have a positive impact, "tho maybe not welcomed with open arms within the pr industry. Obviously the industry is broad and what I'm looking at is the public affairs end of it." He realizes many practitioners will see his newsletter as an attack, but "that comes with the territory. I realize there are ethical, good, hardworking pr practitioners. **But the industry as a whole is inherently anti-democratic.**

"That's not because it's run by evil people who are authoritarians, but because it is such a powerful industry & in some ways unfortunately a tribute to the success of the pr industry that I label it anti-democratic. When you look at the public policy artillery available to major corporations like Monsanto or Philip Morris, they tend to hire many of the same big companies. And when you set these firms loose on political issues on behalf of these big corporations, you're going to overwhelm citizens, the public interest community & journalists. It has a very powerful, dominating influence on public policy. That's a problem & I don't know what else to do about it other than call attention to it. For many people in the industry, reading PR Watch isn't going to be fun."

Stauber invites inquiries from practitioners (608/233-3346). He will be attending & covering PRSA's upcoming conference.

## BLOW THE COVER ON FAXS

Of the hundreds of millions of pages being faxed every day, tens of millions are being thrown away within seconds of receipt, show industry statistics. The throwaway is the cover sheet -- a waste of time & money. Based on an unscientific collection of fax cover sheets, 3M has come up with this list of flaws:

- **Illegible/information too small.** Can't read sender's address or phone. When a piece of company letterhead is used as the basis for a fax cover sheet, frequently the info is in small colored type which turns to mush thru the phone lines.

In a front page editorial headed "Flack Attack" he writes: "Welcome to the first issue of PR Watch. This quarterly publication is dedicated to the public interest, and to the populist ideal of reclaiming democratic debate & decisionmaking from the corporate flacks, hacks, lobbyists & influence peddlers, the practitioners of modern pr who have become a kind of occupation army in our democracy."