

'pr exercise') or a noun in which, when used as slang, dark shades are embedded (as in a recent Washington Post editorial that concluded 'mere pr won't do it'). As we grow the profession -- and we truly are -- we are not 'doing pr'; **we are creating the public relationships that support decisionmaking.** Openness, dialogue, TQM stuff are characteristics of our practice, giving new meanings to 'communication' and 'public relations.' The creation of worthwhile public relationships is driving us and our organizations." -- Bruce Harrison, E. Bruce Harrison Co (DC)

- o "Whether we refer to our profession as pr or public relations is irrelevant. **The problem is much deeper than semantics.** People who view 'pr' as the practice of deceit view 'public relations' in the same light. The only cure for this problem is a firm stand on ethics and the passing of a sufficient amount of time for the change to be noticed. As long as the profession tolerates tobacco companies that insist cigarettes are not a health risk, and oil companies that masquerade as environmental organizations, it makes little difference whether the facade is called pr or public relations." -- Dave Wester (Billings, Mont)

✓ THOSE DAMN RFPs: A CASE STUDY THAT MAY SOUND FAMILIAR

RFPs may be a fact of business, per comments received in response to prr's 4/5 article. But knowing their limitations gives the recipient some control in the process. Fran Hunter (E.C. Hunter Associates, Syracuse), asked by City of Syracuse to respond to its RFP for help creating a promotional brochure, shares her experience with prr:

"We saw the **opportunity not only for business but for public relations education** and decided to respond, as did 10 other organizations.... The City, indicating they were delighted but overwhelmed 'by the wealth of qualified proposals,' asked for additional input from respondents in the form of a 'color comp' for the brochure.

"Keep in mind that, at this point, no consultations have taken place with the 'client.' Anyone who knows anything about the public relations consulting process recognizes that color comps are provided after [many] factors are discussed & decisions made -- **in consultation with the client.** Requesting a 'color comp' at this stage of the RFP process is a waste of everyone's time since the 'comp' that is provided is **never** the brochure that is created after the consulting process is complete.

"We were told 3 of the 10 original RFP respondents declined to provide a 'comp.' We were one of them. There may have been more. Most interestingly, the supplier selected was not one of the better-known, more-experienced public relations suppliers in the area. If **the process eliminated those more experienced suppliers** who recognized what is appropriate & what is not, the taxpayer lost out.

"Since we know our proposed fees were among the lowest -- & others providing proposals may also have been in that position -- there is a very strong question about what kind of capability the City bought with taxpayer dollars. We reflected our thinking to the City by phone & letter, but there was **no indication the City recognized the points we made were valid.**"

TACKLING A NEGATIVE TOPIC & BEING SEEN AS POSITIVE

Liz Claiborne's "Women's Work Team" -- its community relations program -- positions the company as a front-line player in the battle against domestic violence. Negative subjects are dangerous -- since sponsor may become associated with the angst rather than the attempt to help. But central to this project is art -- "designed to heighten awareness & encourage positive social change," Maria Kalligeros of Patrice Tanaka & Co. (NYC) told prr.

Program reflects company's "corporate philosophy of **listening & directly responding to the needs of its customers**":

- o **Commissioned leading visual artists to depict the issue.** Artists' work appeared on billboards & transit shelters thruout San Francisco. "Gannett Outdoor found the program so compelling it donated a percentage of the total space for the billboards."
- o **Addressed issue from a multi-cultural perspective** -- campaign was translated into English, Spanish, Chinese & Korean.
- o **Linked with business community.** Retailers distributed materials & images, sponsored events, sold commemorative t-shirts designed by Liz Claiborne with all proceeds going directly to The San Francisco Domestic Violence Consortium.
- o **Linked with "public partners"** -- NPOs, city agencies & other community groups that share the same social concerns.
- o **Established a multi-disciplinary group of community volunteers** to keep issue top-of-mind & raise funds. \$400,000 was raised.
- o **Set up first centralized, 24-hour crisis phone line** in the city. All images in the campaign displayed this number.
- o **Received an "incredible amount of media pickup"** -- over 100 million consumer impressions to date.
- o **Will expand the program to Boston & Miami** this year. Newly commissioned, original art work will be unveiled in October -- National Domestic Violence Awareness Month.

Compelling, bottomline reason for employer involvement:

Each year, domestic violence costs \$3.5 billion in absenteeism, millions more in increased costs for healthcare benefits.



H&K's STILL-BAD PUBLICITY RAISES ISSUE OF "BACKROOM PR"

Ongoing critiques keep the firm -- and public relations -- in a negative light. Latest is "Lying for a Living" in current Business Ethics (fortunately, not a big circulation mag). Author claims the several well-aided client cases H&K wandered into in recent years have the "industry (sic) rethinking its principles" -- dubious, since the harshest critics have been pr pros, and most of them have used the uniform ethics code as an evaluator of H&K's situation.

Still, PRSA has empowered an Ethics Task Force to look again (chair: immed past pres Rosalee Roberts). And the old question of whether everyone has the right to representation in the court of public opinion is actively debated. H&K has been the catalyst for both events.

ANOTHER BLACK EYE COINCIDES

Day the article hit mailboxes, another gaffe hit the firm. Its

latest religious client, the multimedia spectacle "Jesus Was His Name," had to postpone its heavily promoted opening at Radio City Music Hall when an ecumenical group of critics claimed the show is anti-Semitic. With political correctness rampant, prudent counsel would be expected to see the production or review the script for such potential issues.

- o Or does pr not have this obligation? Issue anticipation would seem to demand it. (What was learned from the Church of Scientology flap?)
- o Business Ethics author Steve Perlstein says: "So many controversies have visited the company that one might wonder whether Hill & Knowlton has been courting calamity."

IS "BACKROOM PR" THE CAUSE?

In the article, counselor Davis Young worries that in the pa arena, "the distinction between pr & lobbying may get lost." PR prof Carol Gorney is

concerned about "the proliferation of pr firms staking their reputation on the amount of power they can wield inside the Beltway."

The issue for the profession seems clear: Does pr help harmonize the views of the public & those in positions of authority? Or does it help officials operate unilaterally in the backroom? Put another way: Does pr work for longterm, participative, win-win solutions? Or for manipulated short term fixes? Elected officials in our era leave no doubt their horizon stretches only to the next election -- which is why legit pr pros have left counseling candidates to "media consultants."

Who's the most prominent emigre from pr to the new Administration? Howard Paster ...from none other than H&K. Who chaired H&K before the debacle? Political insider Bob Gray. Who heads the firm's "public relations division" (but isn't it a public relations firm?): political operative Frank Mankiewicz.

All the big firms with D.C. offices have units that practice influence peddling. It is an "industry," certainly not a profession. It is lucrative. But is it pr?

WILL GERGEN BRING REAGAN STRATEGIES BACK INTO PLAY?

Counselor Isobel Parke attended a PRSA seminar in June '81 that introduced the Reagan team to practitioners. (Why isn't this done whenever there's a new administration?) She noticed all speakers made the same points. Sensing the strategy, she asked David Gergen if he was using a briefing book.

Indeed, he assured her: the **White House Executive Briefing Book**, 24-pg, typewritten, copier-run & stapled, simple but so effective. It enabled Reagan -- elected with only 48% of the vote, since there were 3 candidates in '80 election -- to appear as if everyone had voted for him. His first term was unparalleled in terms of perceived presidential clout.

Getting everyone in the administration to speak with One Clear Voice is how it was engineered, via the briefing book. President Clinton could use strategies that effective. (Maybe Gergen will be able to reform some of the youthful techies who now seem to be in charge.)

"IMPERIAL MEDIA" STUDY ANOTHER PACESETTER

He may not have been responsible for it,

but as Reagan communications director, Gergen put it to use. Study was compiled by Institute for Contemporary Studies, suggested these strategies:

1. Reduce reliance on media events
2. Use honeymoon period to dampen, not raise, expectations
3. Handle the media's tendency to amplify conflict by negotiating in private, then announce the final deal
4. Shift reporters' attention from supposition & plans to facts & figures
5. Discourage personal mingling between press officers & journalists; quit the press club

Clinton could follow several of these with benefit...if Gergen can get such counsel heeded. (Information on both from pr)

STRONG OPINIONS ON WHETHER "PR" IS TABOO

A few examples generated from Sam Black's request to discontinue using the abbreviation "pr" (pr 5/24):

- o "I have little patience for people who believe that whether we call ourselves pr people or whatever has any relevance to how well we're accepted by those who retain or employ us. **Management is more likely to form opinions based on the substance of the issues we choose to champion.** To spend any energy debating such a frivolous issue as whether to use the initials pr does us more harm than good. Do CPAs, MDs & HR execs waste their time & reputation capital on this kind of stuff? Of course not. Don't change the name of the newsletter & please don't give the Sam Blacks of the world space for such dribble." -- Wiley Brooks, The Wiley Brooks Co (Seattle)
- o "Sam Black underscores the point that you, we and our critics have been saying for years, that 'pr' has fallen into the category of epithetic slight. A shorthand adjective to put down a noun (as in Sam's example: