

INFLUENCING ADULTS THRU KIDS: STRATEGY NOW USED IN VOTING

1. Personal computers, automatic teller machines & other **technological challenges** to adults have been introduced by using children as teachers & trainers. Adults balk, kids learn (easily), then show parents how & provide reasons why.
2. Some products depend on educating children to assure future generations of buyers -- especially nutritional or "**good for you**" items like milk. Providing nutrition & health curricula has become a staple for teachers. It also spawned an industry producing materials that product or issue proponents would like to get into the classroom.
3. **Kids Voting USA** is a 7 yr old program, begun in Arizona, that involves kids in mock voting -- as a way to get their parents interested, and into real voting booths. Based on a Costa Rican tradition where children vote mock ballots alongside their parents. Children's ballots are tabulated & published & they're encouraged to discuss politics with their parents. Country's voter participation rate has gone over 90% at times.

In US, program is now in place in 20 states & the District of Columbia. In the 11 states that participated in the Kids Voting program during the '92 election, adult voter turnout was 3% above the national average -- that's 88,000 additional voters.

4. For practitioners, "family values" may have an unexpected meaning.

ITEMS OF IMPORTANCE TO PROFESSIONALS

¶ **PROVING FUNDS & RESOURCES ARE USED FOR COMMUNITY BETTERMENT**, & reporting on it, is increasingly a factor for all NPOs (see pr 10/31). The IRS has its own way to make sure NPOs are doing it -- Form 990. "It reports income & revenue expenses for a tax exempt organization," an IRS spokesperson told pr. "Periodically, the IRS reviews these forms with the specific purpose of determining whether or not the organization is functioning within its charter." The forms are also open to public inspection.

¶ **MAJOR STRATEGIC MISTAKE IN THE MAKING?** CEOs still don't get it, if a study reported in last week's pr is correct. It found they rank stakeholders in two tiers: First tier, customers & stockholders. Second tier, "ranked considerably lower", employees, gov't and, at the bottom, community. In an era when issue debates find publics distrusting both accused & accuser, so that third party advocates are the deciding factor, an organization's standing in its community & with its neighbors is becoming the most powerful, make-or-break relationship. The info highway means the universe knows instantly, or can learn easily, how organizations behave **at home** -- & how it treats employees & gov't agencies. There are no tiers any more, if even there were. The rule is Total Relationship Management.

SITUATIONAL THEORY OF PUBLICS KEY TO EFFECTIVE TARGETING

What's the difference between audiences, publics, constituencies & stakeholders? (Another case where the language of communication is uncommunicative.) For 25 years Jim Grunig & others have conducted studies that today enable practitioners to avoid this semantic problem and precisely target groups whose involvement & support, or lack of opposition, is critical to success.

In a paper presented to the International PR Research Symposium in Bled, Slovakia, Grunig summarizes the research for practical use:

START BY REALIZING MOST PEOPLE DON'T CARE ABOUT YOUR ISSUE

- A. **The 2 key questions from the beginnings of pr** have been: 1) what is a public? 2) What are the "opinions" of publics, whether expressed as attitudes, behavior etc?
- B. **A major flaw in practitioners' & managerial thinking** is that "most people have opinions on most issues" -- which led to the "mass opinion" concept, and thus to "mass communication" as the tactic. But as one scholar notes,

"Fifty years of survey research has overwhelmingly confirmed that the bulk of the general population is both uninterested & uninformed on most matters that could be construed as public affairs."

- C. **Large majorities on any issue are "ignorant & apathetic"** -- and as a sociologists' joke puts it, if you ask them whether they are, they'll say "I don't know & I don't care." This is ever more true as people suffer from over-communication, over-business & over-organization.

THE SKILL IS TO KNOW WHO DOES CARE - & WHY

- D. **The situational theory permits segmenting** a general population into groups pr finds relevant. Publics "begin as disconnected systems of individuals experiencing common problems" -- best labeled **stakeholders**, since they have a stake in the problem or wouldn't be experiencing it.
- E. **When an issue or triggering event arises**, the large stakeholder group reacts by sorting itself into **publics**, starting with 2 groupings:
 1. **Passive**, which processes information; 2. **Active**, which seeks it.



- F. **This differentiation is critical to practitioners** by identifying who will use communication (of whatever type) to form cognitions or shape actions; and who lets it in one ear/eye & out the other. The passive group may read or watch the news about your issue, may even know they have a stake -- but are unlikely to do much about it.
- G. **One of the challenges is to engage passive publics** in cases where it may be necessary (it isn't in most). Grunig told a PRSA seminar in Columbus, O, he isn't sure it's possible on any large scale.

WHAT MOTIVATES ACTIVE PUBLICS - & HOW TO PLAN FOR IT

H. The active public can be sorted into 3 groups:

- 1) *All issues*, interested in the full ramifications of the topic;
- 2) *Special interest*, concerned only about certain elements of the topic;
- 3) *Hot issue*, aroused only by emotionally debated elements.

Add the *passive public* and there are a total of 4 groups into which stakeholders subdivide on any issue category.

Dramatic Example From Current News:

A waste disposal facility is proposed at a site near an aquifer.

- **Stakeholders** include the 4,000 residents of the host neighborhood.
- A public hearing is held, 400 attend -- making 3600 the **passive** or apathetic public.

Of 7 key points to be covered, the most interest around town is in potential groundwater pollution (the aquifer).

- After that discussion, 200 people leave -- the **hot issue** public.
- Another 100 depart after various other topics, such as number of trucks per day that will come to the site; these are **special interest** publics.
- When local officials take a straw vote at the end of the meeting, only 100 residents are on hand -- the **all issues** public.
[Highlighting point G above.]

I. Communicating with & involving stakeholders & publics faces 3 tests:

- a) *Problem Recognition* -- they must accept that a real problem (or opportunity) exists. The natural response to any situation one is trying to duck is, "That's not a problem."
- b) *Level of Involvement* (Or personification) -- they must be convinced it affects them. The avoidance response is, "OK, it's a problem -- but it doesn't involve me."
- c) *Constraint Recognition* -- they must believe they can do something about it & are not constrained from taking action if they choose. The typical response is, "It's a problem & it involves me, but I can't do anything about it."

CONCLUSION Meeting these tests can only be achieved with targeted communications. The role of mass communication & mass media is very circumscribed. (For a copy of the paper, write prr)

INTERNAL COMMUNICATION NOW ON 2 LEVELS -- BOTH FACE-TO-FACE

There appears to be little resistance left to the strategy of supervisor-as-communicator -- except that in teaming organizations, where everyone is empowered & accountable, literal "supervisors" are obsolete. "Team leader" is the probable replacement term, reflecting a new mode of operation.

An equally important shift has not been heralded. It is widely practiced, without enunciating its profound meaning. That is the face-to-face communication becoming universal for CEOs & sr mgrs. Town halls, "lunch withs," departmental talk-outs & similar open forums with employees are everywhere.

2-LEVEL STRATEGY ESSENTIAL

Meeting the full communication needs of an organization requires:

1. **Need-to-know, job related information, plus explaining local impact of the vision...**by "supervisors...direct & face-to-face"
 - replaces or in concert with employee publications, etc.
2. **Symbolic reinforcement of need-to-know, plus championing the vision** ...by CEO & other sr mgrs...direct and/or group & face-to-face
 - sometimes moves to videoconferencing, is the driving force behind split-screen computer development & other "distance" technologies
 - includes the danger-strewn corollary of "walking the talk" in which sr mgrs' actions -- individually in decisionmaking & as a group in policy-setting -- win or lose employee adherence to vision & goals.

Tho no research is evident on the subject, it's clear category 2 is often overlooked or under-attended to -- even in organizations moving ahead on making supervisors the main internal communications medium.

Each of these trends supports what research has found for decades:

- a) Employees want to get necessary info direct from their supervisors;
- b) The first topic of interest to them is where the org'n is headed, which they want to hear about from those who set the strategies.

WHAT'S NEW IS RECOGNITION OF SR. MGMT'S SYMBOLIC ROLE

Or perhaps a better way to explain it is that, while this has always been true, the current work environment will not tolerate hypocrites. The bemoaned loss of confidence in management can usually be traced here.