

apprehension, mistrust & short-term perspectives abound. "What we're seeing is quite remarkable. It's a yearning to believe again. To have faith in the possibilities. Even in the fantastical." He cites these examples:

- **Topping the NYTimes best seller list** are *The Celestine Prophecy*, *Embraced By The Light*, *Care of the Soul* & *The Road Less Traveled*.
- **New Age sections of bookstores** have expanded more than any other area. There are crystals & angels in every mall in America.
- **There is a powerful born-again movement** with a presidential candidate & host of his own tv show -- Pat Buchanan. And no one is surprised that the Pope's new book is number one, or that an order of monks has a hot CD on its hands. [Considering his hard-line, my-way-or-else positions, does Buchanan fit here -- or is he the new fascism, as some claim?]
- **People are going to retreats** to find their inner child; sweat lodges to re-connect with Native American traditions; joining 12-step programs to enlist the help of a higher power.

"A leap of faith does not mean action that doesn't make good business sense. Nickelodeon, Disney, Hewlett-Packard & Microsoft were visions that made good sense. **They just weren't provable in 6 months.**"

"If people are turning toward faith in the unproven & immeasurable -- surely we should follow this through & see what it tells us about how we should do business.... The yearning we see in the culture at large is a huge opportunity for the world of communications."

"WE CALL THIS THE TINKERBELL PROPHECY"

Tinkerbell wasn't just a fairy with magical powers. There was a contract between Tinkerbell & her audience. You had to do more than just believe in her if you didn't want her power to wither & die. You had to act on your belief, to demonstrate it, to make the fairy come back to life. You had to clap & then she could make her magic.

"It's the same in business. If we don't believe in our dreams & act on our beliefs, the dreams won't happen & business won't change. And organizations that don't change in response to the marketplace are likely to wither & die."

MONEY - FIRST, FIGHTING IT OUT IN PUBLIC MEANS BOTH SIDES LOSE

Frank Dolson's retirement column, after 41 years as Phila. Inquirer sports editor, applies to school boards & teachers, hospitals & doctors (or nurses), businesses & unions, etc: "It's been sad to see the course sports have taken in recent years. How can anyone who loves baseball not be sickened by what the men who own the teams, & those who play for them, have done to the game? And the hypocrisy prevalent in big-time college athletics is just as disgusting. The Olympic Games have become a giant tv show. Too big. Too professional. Too much a symbol of the big-money, big-business approach that is tearing out the heart of big league baseball."

THINK IT THRU: CRISIS DECISIONS HAVE LASTING IMPACT

Tho they often must be made in a hurry, decisions made during a crisis "will have impact on relationships & trust for years to come," believes Don Sherry, mgr comms, Oklahoma Natural Gas (Oklahoma City). He recounts ONG's recent crisis experience in a letter to prr:

- **ONG is located less than a block from the site of the bombed Murrah federal building.** Employees "felt & saw the explosion -- some were knocked to the floor, others were pelted with flying glass. All endured the further trauma of an evacuation predicated on the belief that other explosions could be imminent."
- **Offices were temporarily moved**, because the building was damaged & became part of the "crime site." Once logistics were worked out, "we faced the challenge of how best to deal with our employees' emotional needs. The prospect of returning to the downtown building -- even as the grim work of recovering bodies continued only a short distance away -- was overwhelming for some."

SIGNIFICANT RELATIONSHIP - BUILDING DECISIONS

1. **Counseling takes top priority.** ONG's 2 full-time counselors (part of its employee assistance program) met with individuals, arranged small group "critical stress debriefings" -- "opportunities for employees to share their experiences & discover they are not alone in their feelings & reactions to the tragedy."
2. **Return to downtown offices is delayed** "to give employees adequate time to prepare emotionally to return to the scene of the terrorist attack. In spite of the physical damage to our building, we could have returned sooner than we did. But heeding advice of both public relations & psychological counsel, the senior vp decided to keep employees in their temporary locations for a week beyond our original planned return. This posed some operational difficulty, but paid significant dividends in terms of employee comfort & well-being."
3. **Supervisors get wide latitude for granting vacations, leaves.** "Even as late as when the remainder of the Murrah building was demolished, efforts were made to accommodate all employee requests for vacation time."
4. **Supervisors & employees are encouraged to respect others' feelings**, "acknowledging that individuals react differently to the same situation. There is no right way to grieve."



1-ON-1 COMMUNICATION CRITICAL IN AN EMOTIONAL SITUATION

All the usual forms -- pub'ns, e-mail, recorded news hotline -- were used. "But the most important form has been direct, one-on-one conversation & small group meetings. Our president spent a day meeting personally with as many employees as possible, conveying the company's concern & appreciation for work under the most trying of circumstances."

- Supporting employees' desire to contribute funds to aid victims, ONG is matching employee gifts & making a separate corporate contribution.

"We still have much to deal with & will for a long time to come. But it's clear that when an organization demonstrates genuine human compassion & concern, it contributes to employee loyalty & dedication in a way that little else could match."

One employee's conversation with Sherry sums up the relationship-building benefit: "You will never know how much I appreciate how the company handled this. It makes me feel good to work here."

ONE MORE REASON FOR GOING AROUND THE MEDIA TO PUBLICS

"You've probably heard about First Chicago's plan to charge a fee to visit a bank teller under certain circumstances," writes Harlan Teller, Burson-Marsteller (Chi), which is advising the bank on culture change & marketing issues -- particularly the communications strategy & materials regarding the "deposit repricing" initiative. Background & lessons learned from the "teller fee mania":

BACKGROUND: MEDIA'S PLAY ON STORY IS THE CHEAP SHOT

- **"In Their Quest To Simplify** what was a complex announcement, the media landed hard on the most obvious story angle out of the welter of information provided to them... These issues were clearly dealt with in a long & painstaking briefing for banking reporters involving senior bank officials. Yet what was reported was the \$3 teller fee, pure & simple. The story then took on a life of its own, aided & abetted by grandstanding politicians & late night comedians."
- **"We & First Chicago Expected To Take The Heat** for what we knew would be a difficult business decision for many to swallow & digest. You don't 'pr your way' out of a situation like that. Yet everything was done short of escorting the media to the teller window to make sure they had the whole story & could put the teller fees into some kind of context. For the most part, they chose not to do so. That's their prerogative. I suppose that's why pr professionals call media relations 'uncontrolled communications.'"
- **Bank Is Turning Corner From Media Standpoint.** Recent Crain's editorial is entitled *Flap Over Teller Fees Is Misplaced Hysteria*. "We suspect the final chapter of the teller fee story will have a happy ending,

which does happen sometimes -- especially when a business decision is made on the basis of 18 months of painstaking research & analysis. It also helps when that decision is adhered to despite 2 weeks of intense, relentless media scrutiny & facile comparisons to such marketing 'disasters' as New Coke."

LESSONS LEARNED: GO DIRECT TO KEY STAKEHOLDERS

- **Communicate With Customers First** before announcing it to the media. "We have learned (or perhaps relearned) that getting information into customers' hands before they see it in the media is crucially important."
- **Get Employees Up-To-Speed Before Going Public.** "Branch employees, the bank's first line of defense against irate customers, were provided communications materials beforehand. They supported the teller fee decision & have done an excellent job of explaining the decision & telling customers about less costly banking options."
- **Educate Stakeholders.** Gov't & community leaders "can have a profound impact on our ability to do business -- & can influence the behavior of customers. Some upfront seed planting with these influencers could have helped greatly in mitigating the impact of the first wave of stories."
- **Strong Relationships Help Overcome Adversity.** "First Chicago's strong relationships with the minority community & civic & political leaders helped turn the noise level down about the teller fees & beat back demagoguery from outsiders."
- **Research Is Essential To Avoid Overreacting** -- "the kind of overnight quantitative research Wirthlin did for the bank to assess the damage created by the media coverage. Wirthlin findings told us that while we did have serious misperceptions among our customers, they were not prepared to abandon the bank in droves." [Remember, also, that media don't change attitudes or behaviors, they merely reinforce existing ones -- or in this case confuse.]

WHAT REALLY RANKLES

...is the "brace of pr 'experts' on display, mostly trashing First Chicago's communications strategy," notes Teller. "Those of us who fight the good fight for the integrity of public relations have been treated to the unsightly but all-too-typical spectacle of individuals in our business using someone else's misery as a bully & very public pulpit for themselves."

"This kind of pontificating does nothing but harm our industry -- an industry that struggles on its best days for the stature accorded professionals in other service businesses. **We don't deserve respect if we continue to use the media to, in effect, eat our own young.**"

ADMAN SEES PEOPLE SEEKING HOPE: THE "TINKERBELL PROPHECY"

A new attitude is emerging, finds Michael Jeary, CEO of Saatchi & Saatchi (NYC). **Belief & vision are alive in today's culture where cynicism,**