

## FINDING THE TRUTHS IN ORGANIZATIONAL RESTRUCTURING

Ambrose Schwallie, CEO of Westinghouse Savannah River Co., outlined his experience regarding truth telling that supports re-invention & re-engineering. He calls the process "Top Down and Bottom Up."

The Cold War was a guarantee of stability for Savannah River, a gov't contractor whose business mission was dominated by its demands: secrecy, security & materials production for nuclear weapons. End of the Cold War resulted in dramatic change for WSRC, presenting a series of re-engineering challenges with trust & credibility as primary business factors. Schwallie has led the company through these changes & offers the following insights:

### The first of 3 truths necessary to facilitate change: Simplicity

Schwallie has developed 4 imperatives as key to the success of WSRC:

- ¶ safety      ¶ disciplined operations      ¶ continuous improvement
- ¶ cost effectiveness (missions have to reflect the new global realities at the end of the Cold War)

Training & communication programs are based on these imperatives, as are all aspects of the company. A 5th imperative is being added -- teamwork.

**Truth #2: Involve your audience.** 2 years ago WSRC redesigned & improved (mgmt thought) its 401k program. But employees were displeased because it directly affected their income. After this problem was realized, company held a meeting with employees to hear complaints, concerns & suggestions -- which resulted in changes to program. Had employees been involved from the beginning, it would have saved a great deal of effort.

**Truth #3: It takes time -- be patient.**

## FRANCIS FUKUYAMA: "TELLING THE TRUTH" HAS SOCIETAL DIFFERENCES

Example: A Chinese father commits a crime. When the police come looking for him & ask his son where the father is, the son does not betray his father because the highest level of trust is family. Consequently, Chinese businesses are primarily family-based & don't endure more than 2 or 3 generations due to lack of growth -- family is who you trust, but family is limited. Can't build large marketing org'ns with durable institutional roots. (Altho small family businesses tend to be more successful in constantly changing industries such as textiles or fashion.)

In Japanese society, however, obligations to the state are higher than those to family, so the son would turn his father in. Economic implications: easy to hire professional managers -- 18th century group of merchants agreed not to turn businesses over to their children but to prof'l bookkeepers, which set basis for modern networks. Culture permitted higher degree of trust among people other than family.

Same examples apply to Europe. Italy (especially central & southern) is more like the Chinese model, while Germany is more like the Japanese.

## TRUTH UNDERLIES SOUND PR -- BUT WHAT EXACTLY IS TRUTH?

Practitioners almost daily must determine what is truthful. Illustrating there isn't one capital-T truth are the divergent views expressed at PRSA's Annual Conference, which took truth as its theme. Guidance -- or confusion -- from several speakers:

### BELIEVER IN "UNIVERSAL TRUTH" SEES DECLINE OF TRUTH

In a controversial speech, Lynne Cheney, author *Telling the Truth* & host CNN's Sunday Crossfire, described her opinion on the status of truth and the dangers of political correctness. Her beliefs include:

- There is an external truth that can be reached if we pursue it. We need to go back to the Age of Enlightenment -- which sought "absolute truth"
- Truth transcends our experience. The post-modern notion of truth (i.e., truth comes from within & is defined by the individual) is dangerous in setting social policy
- Belief in absolute truth declines with the younger generations. This is reflected in politics: Clinton, a post-modern president, continually constructs the truth appropriate for him at that time
- Humanities research is now concerned with race, gender & class; it should focus on gaining abiding insights into truth & beauty. Revisionist history is focusing on race & gender as the key to explaining our society

The semantics of this subject adds to the difficulty. *Truth* is used most often to imply the veracity or attempts at accuracy of a person communicating some information: "Is he telling the truth?" *True* is a synonym for *factual*: "Is it true, are those the facts?" *Facts* are observable, known or agreed interpretations of data. *Perceptions* are each individual's interpretations of data. Interestingly, PRSA's speakers often appeared to violate these definitions.

### CHENEY'S EXAMPLES OF POLITICAL CORRECTNESS & REVISION OF TRUTH

1. Columbia asking for research grant based on premise that Columbus was a genocidal murderer & the natives a gentle, peace-loving people.
2. **Community journalism** -- which seeks to influence the outcome rather than give an objective account of the situation.
3. Claims that **some history textbooks** are now written not to tell "the truth" -- but with the avowed purposes of 1) advancing the esteem of



some groups and 2) to disunify the nation so it could no longer have a military force able to wage war.

#### 4. Report of AAUW on the negative effects on girls of the school system.

"But more girls than boys graduate from high school; more boys are held back and receive special ed; girls are more ambitious than boys when they get to college."

Audience was divided by what many perceived to be a political party approach to truth. However, there was general applause when a Russian visitor reminded the audience that deliberate subversion of the truth leads to political and social disaster in a totalitarian regime.

### INVESTIGATIVE REPORTER TELLS "WHY THE TRUTH IS HARD TO FIND"

Bob Woodward, asst mng ed, Washington Post & hero of Watergate, delineated the barriers to truth -- which trip up even those trying to be truthful:

- People fail to understand the truth; simply get the facts wrong.
- People lie, misrepresent, misconstrue, manipulate.
- People get trapped by conventions, habits of thinking.
- People make assumptions & hold biases about what, who is important.
- People are not fully open to the truth.
- What people think is true at first, often is not.
- Our memories are imperfect.
- People often don't like the truth, fear it, don't want to hear it.
- People pursue wrong information, follow false leads, get taken off course.

In Woodward's experience, "The best people in public relations are those who take the approach to find out what really happened, to find the truth & push it all out there."

### COMPANY FACING HEALTH ISSUE ASKS "WHO'S TRUTH IS IT, ANYWAY?"

Mike Gaughan & Jeff Julin of MGA Communications (Denver) raise several thoughts to be considered on this issue:

#### What is "truth"?

- The quality or state of being accurate
- Honesty, integrity, justice
- What we have determined to be factual

#### "Truth" vs. perception:

- Perception -- a single unified awareness derived from sensory processes
- An intuitive recognition
- Perception colors "truth"

#### Our personal values and "truth":

- Value -- to consider with respect to worth, excellence, usefulness or importance
- An ideal that arouses an emotional response for or against
- Values define truth

#### The Challenge:

- Perceptions can vary greatly because we each factor in our background, education, beliefs, emotional state, etc.
- Values are more consistent but must be respected not changed
- There are indisputable truths but truth is not always indisputable

To illustrate these concepts, they offer the case of Schuller International (a subsidiary of Manville Corp), producers of fiberglass.

#### THE PROBLEM, 2 EXISTING TRUTHS

Int'l Agency for Research on Cancer (IARC) lists fiberglass as a possible carcinogen (arriving at this conclusion by implanting fiberglass in mice, who then developed tumors). This created a worker health & safety issue with the potential of becoming a consumer issue. Due to a history with asbestos product liability, however, Manville lacked the credibility to question IARC's research methods, even tho internal research at Schuller showed that -- while there were a few instances of cancer among employees -- it wasn't a major problem; & determined that fiberglass is safe when using prudent work practices -- wearing a mask, covering extremities, etc...

This is like lawyers saying, "That is true ... but what else is also true?"

To combat the problem, Schuller went to target audiences. To reach consumers, labeled all bags of fiberglass, "Fiberglass is safe when using prudent work practices." Targeted media, employees, shareholders by acknowledging IARC's claim (their "truth") but presenting Schuller's truth as well, and allowing people to draw their own conclusions.

#### THE VALUES AT STAKE IN THIS CASE

- Worker safety
- Professional integrity
- Continued employment
- Stability of investment
- Public's right to know

#### In sum:

- Truth is not always indisputable
- Each person's truths are valid
- Acknowledge others' truths
- Values define truth
- Perception colors truth
- The stronger the opinion the more likely there's a truth (is God a truth or an opinion?)
- A truth is much more difficult to change than an opinion
- Credibility is the foundation on which different truths can exist
- Credibility is built thru actions not words

Not convinced that truth is subjective? Julin & Gaughan suggest this exercise. Have each member of a group (keep groups small, just 3 or 4) write down 8 words they think of when they hear the following words: "communication," "love" & "sex." Allow 1 minute per list. Then compare the results -- you'll be amazed. In a room of 4 small groups, only 1 word within 1 group overlapped with all its members!