

primarily at older staffers), research techniques, media rels, persuasion techniques, invoices & billing.

- **Seniors are offered a higher degree of training.** One firm has developed a specialized audit of mgmt techniques. Then, a personalized training program is developed to help the mgr improve on the audit findings.
- **Accreditation programs play very little part in the training programs.** None of the 6 firms required eligible staff to stand for the APR (or ABC) exam, tho 2 firms say they encourage account staff to seek the APR.
- **There is no quid pro quo between training & pay.** But one exec said, "Skill development does impact salaries & promotions, & training enhances skill development."

(More from Meeker at Edward Howard & Co, 1 Cascade plaza, Akron 44308-1121; 330/376-6500)

2 WEB SITES TO CHECK OUT:

1. **www.prmuseum.com** is designed to teach how creative ideas, developed for industry, education & gov't, were applied to successful pr programs of the past. First exhibit follows the career of Edward L. Bernays. A series of hyperlinked dates illustrate Bernays' career from 1915-1960. Using stories & photos, site shows & tells how pr developed thru 2 World Wars, the women's suffrage movement, birth of radio & tv, & other critical events in US history. Future exhibits will focus on Arthur Page & on Ivy Lee. (Created & hosted by Spector & Assocs)
2. **www.davishays.com** is devoted exclusively to employee communication. It offers tips, case studies & strategic insights on key employee com'n issues: a) helping managers communicate; b) capitalizing on technology; c) conducting employee research; d) communicating corporate strategy; e) supporting culture change. (Launched by Davis Hays & Co.)

ITEMS OF INTEREST TO PROFESSIONALS

¶ **Don't rest on your diversity laurels.** "What we're discovering is you've got to keep your eye on the diversity-hiring issue; it isn't a done deal," explains Chuck Huffman, staff director for diversity development, McDonald's. Early echelons of people hired in diversity programs now have advanced thru promotions, but their vacated positions are not automatically refilled in pre-existing race-gender proportions, he explains. (See this week's t&t for related info)

¶ **Litigation communication** is focus of 2 new partnerships: Hill & Knowlton's NY-based litigation support group with San Francisco attorney Bonnie Cohen; Kamber Group forms a new national practice group to handle the pr aspects of large-scale litigation. "Being effective in high-profile litigation, especially class action lawsuits, means looking at the total picture, not just the courtroom. The court of public perception is more important than ever before," says Cohen. [Can lawyers & pr work synergistically in the same firm? Or are they natural competitors? See Al Ries' comments last week about adv'g & pr.]

CASE: AMBASSADOR PROGRAM TOUCHES COMMUNITY -- & EMPLOYEES

Because there was a "gap in people's perceptions about what we stood for in the community," St. John Hospital & Med Ctr (Detroit) began its ambassador program. "We needed to get out in our community, be more visible as neighbors, corporate citizens, as supporters of our community because our research showed there was a deficit in how our community saw us. People know we are good at healthcare & if they are sick this is the place to come, especially if they have a heart problem. Beyond that there was a void," Greg Jakub, dpr, told pr.

BEGINNINGS 5 years ago, with about 7 people, the ambassador program launched its first event -- "adopting" the "islands" in the roads in front of the hospital, cleaning them up & planting flowers. "It was a visible symbol of our concern for the community because thousands of cars pass by us daily. It brought us a lot of recognition."

NEXT STEP Piggybacked on the mayor's newly developed community program called "Detroit Clean Sweep" -- where every citizen was encouraged to clean up his or her own front yard. "We thought, 'we're doing this already.' By piggybacking on his efforts we were able to support his program & get recognition from the city at large for our work."

FORMALIZED PROGRAM TO GAIN RECOGNITION Decided to capture the random, unorganized events that were going on in the hospital, putting them under the ambassador umbrella & bringing recognition to them -- providing t-shirts, hats, etc that would give St. John visibility in the community.

"**Everybody is an ambassador.** You don't have to join a special program or need any special training. Just the fact that they're a member of this organization & are in the community makes them ambassadors. So by recognizing that, we were empowering them to go out & be involved in the community. We didn't change a lot of what was going on, we just packaged it differently."

PARTNER WITH COMMUNITY GROUPS Rather than build projects from the ground up, "we want to be a catalyst for things already happening in the community, to develop partnerships." They now meet with a number of neighborhood groups, asking where their help is most needed. "We want to make a real contribution. We need the community's help to do that."



Hospital's involvement increases participation by community as well. "St. John would pull up with a busload of people & the community organization would say, "Well, gee, here's this hospital coming out to clean up our community. We should have our people here, too." We act as a catalyst."

KEY TO SUCCESS

...is the support of Operations & Security.

Operations provides tools -- rakes, shovels, landscaping equipment, paint, supplies, etc. "When people show up, the tools are already there." Security became involved as events began reaching out into the community. "We have to get people there. Plus we go into neighborhoods that are unfamiliar, not real friendly, with higher crime. But those are the ones we want to go to because that's where the need is."

Planning is also multi-disciplinary. "People from all around the hospital are so passionate about this program that, as long as I serve lunch, they'll come & help plan."

INVOLVEMENT

800 people are interested in being involved, are listed in the database. 400 have done 1 or more events over the years. 200 have done several events & make up the core of the program. "They are passionate about it. They are the heart & soul of the program. I've been able to tap into them to sell the program to other employees because they are so enthusiastic."

HOW IT WORKS

1. **Range of opportunities** is provided to appeal to many. "Not everyone wants to paint a house or clean up."
2. **"PR dep't is the gateway** to these opportunities. It does the research & bridgebuilding to identify what's out there, then makes it easy for employees to get involved by printing a list of opportunities 2 times per year. Dep'ts with teams look for what appeals to them; pr puts them in touch with the organization."
3. **Most events happen after work or on Saturday.** Planning & a few events occur during work time. "We're working now on a policy that would provide release time for employees. We have to find creative ways to get more people involved."

COSTS

Relative to an adv'g or mkt'g campaign, program is inexpensive. Costs are mainly planning time, hats, t-shirts, supplies. Total for all of last year was \$4,800 -- for 30 events.

BENEFITS

1. **"It gets us out of our corporate womb/isolation.** There was a reluctance to go into some of the needy areas. We were able to get a number of our top executives to come out & work on those projects, which really made a statement for the program."
2. **"It's a real leveler** in terms of people's roles -- a vp working next to a nurse working next to someone from environmental services or maintenance. It brings out the value of being involved in the community regardless of who you are. *Ambassadorship is everybody's role.*"

More than being ambassadors with a message to communicate, "our need was to get people out there actively working in our community as the message." Ambassador programs show **behaviorally** what you stand for.

PRACTITIONER TRAINING: "A PROMISE WAITING TO BE KEPT"

Fewer than half the active pr practitioners have formal education in the field, notes counselor David Meeker in his Syracuse U. master's thesis, "Training for Excellence in Public Relations Counseling Firms: A Promise Waiting to be Kept." To discover what large US pr firms are doing to train for excellence, Meeker surveyed 6 of the top 20. Some findings:

EMPLOYEE ENTITLEMENT ISSUE

- "Training has moved from an enrichment activity to a competitiveness issue & is moving to an employee entitlement. We are only going to attract the people we want if we can offer them the growth they are looking for in a career," notes one sr exec.
- In another firm without training, an exec says, "Our lack of training contributes to our high turnover rate. Many people tell us the reason they are leaving is because they are not learning anything here."
- "We want to keep people with the company & we try to keep people interested. Training helps in that regard. We work toward systematic development & long-term growth. Turnover is so expensive," says a human resources mgr.

"Given the need for training to help practitioners keep pace with the changing world, there is a training void waiting to be filled."

TRAINING IS UNEVEN

- Survey confirmed this, even among large firms, at least for this sample. For mid-size & smaller firms, training appears to be in short supply, he finds.
- **"Training today barely touches on the social sciences -- sociology, psychology, political science, economics, etc -- & nowhere was there mention of the ethics of the profession..."**

WHERE TRAINING IS DONE

- **Internal mgmt & staffing** is the rule. Some supplement with outside experts.
- **Most comprehensive program** requires 5 days of training annually.
- **5 of the 6 firms regularly send staff to outside training programs.** The 1 that doesn't believes its own personnel can run better programs.
- **Topics that directly relate to servicing accounts** are most common: basic client counseling skills, presentation training, writing, client contact & reporting. Presented less often but still frequently provided are: proposal writing, sales skills, using the Internet (aimed