

interactive listening devices may be pr's greatest contribution to harmonious relationships. This is so powerful that research shows physicians who truly communicate with patients -- listening as well as talking -- are far less likely to be sued.

¶ **Toyota presents a customer satisfaction conundrum.** Its vehicles top sales & car quality lists, but its gen mgr told the Auto Show in Detroit its dealers are as bad as its cars are good -- ranking 30<sup>th</sup> of 37 brands in J.D.Power surveys of how new car buyers say they were treated. He feels the cars' quality makes them so easy to sell dealers forget common courtesies. Archrival Honda, however, led the customer satisfaction revolution in the auto industry. One planned motivator: change dealer reward programs to reflect how well they treat customers. (Behavioral science rule no.2: people do that for which they are rewarded)

¶ **Good comeback -- which all frustrated computer users can agree with.** At the COMDEX show, Bill Gates reportedly compared the computer & auto industries: "If GM had kept up with technology like the computer industry has, we would be driving \$25 cars that got 1000 mpg." GM addressed this arrogance by releasing this brief statement: "Yes, but would you want your car to crash twice a day?!"

¶ **Portent of the future shape of medium-size pr firms?** Thought leader Morgan & Myers has formed a joint venture -- not a merger -- with Sargent & Potratz Integrated Mktg Comms. M&M describes itself as "most recognized for strategic pr counseling & reputation mgmt services." S&P adds advertising, direct mktg, sales promotion, interactive & mktg publicity. They will combine offices among their 5 joint locations -- and work together, but with no obligation to share clients.

## WHO'S WHO IN PUBLIC RELATIONS

**MOVING ON.** Marilyn Laurie (currently AT&T evp, brand strategy & mktg com'ns, formerly svp-pr) leaves April 1. Her statement to colleagues will sound familiar to practitioners everywhere: "It's been a helluva ride...but it's getting difficult to tell where AT&T stops & I begin." After a few months in the South of France she plans to return to NYC for a new challenge -- "something entirely different." New pr head is longtime AT&T Dick Martin.

**HONORS.** PRSA/LA awards Nat Read (Read Communications) the Outstanding PR Professional Award; Peter Case (Merrill Lynch) the Outstanding Corporate Citizen Award

- Corporate; Gail Abarbanel (Rape Treatment Ctr at Santa Monica-UCLA Med Ctr) the Outstanding Corporate Citizen Award - Nonprofit; Greg Waskul (Waskul Worldwide Communications) the Joseph Roos Community Service Award; Emanuela Cariolaqian (Manning, Selvage & Lee) the Tom Trevett Award honoring an outstanding young pr professional.

The Walt Seifert Scholarship has been established at Kent State, his alma mater, by Bob Dilenschneider, his ex-pupil at Ohio State -- where he taught, influenced pr education & the founding of PRSSA and generally raised hell for a quarter century.

## COUNTERINTUITIVE TRENDS TO BUILD INTO '98 PLANNING

Life, literature & pr practice all teach that things aren't necessarily as they seem. At this unusual time in history -- a single superpower, an economy that is truly global, a new millennium about to start, the move from industrialism to informationism well underway -- many widely believed sociopolitical factors are counterintuitive.

For starters, there's the media/politician belief Americans aren't internationalists, when the most comprehensive study shows they indeed are (prr 12/15/97). Some others (among many) to watch for:

### NEIGHBORHOODS ARE REAL -- & SAFE

43% told Yankelovich their neighborhood is as friendly as the one they grew up in ... & 17% feel it's even friendlier. Concludes study sponsor Lutheran Brotherhood, "Americans feel comfortable with the people they live around."

- Compare this with last night's tv news or show, today's front page, the subjects of new bills from legislators at all levels
- This is a another reality check against the distortion that occurs when 75% of all reported news originates in NYC, DC or LA ... but 75% of all real news events originate elsewhere
- Further evidence from the study: 69% have offered to give, or have received, help from neighbors in the past year
- 61% know their neighbors very/fairly well; and 47% chat with them 5 or more times each month, with another 37% doing so 1 to 4 times

### WALL STREET'S SELF-IMPORTANCE & GREED COULD OVERREACH -- EVEN WITH A BULL MARKET

Many winced -- since most shareholders & mutual fund holders are working folks -- when the Street cheered RIFs & massive layoffs. Only holiday distraction may have saved it from scorn for another egregious act -- pushing the market down 147 pts on 12/18 when, at last, a truly democratic election toppled a scandal-ridden military dictatorship in South Korea.

New president Kim Dae-Jung was persecuted for years by the military dictators & once sentenced to death for instigating a pro-democracy uprising -- in which troops killed thousands. But because he was elected by the people, whom he will assumedly serve, Wall Street in effect said it preferred dictators who serve the big companies.

- Is nothing of more value to big investors & fund managers than making another few bucks?



- The latter bunch is especially culpable: most haven't the managerial skill to run a newsstand, yet they tell management of the most sophisticated corporations how to handle their affairs. Tho they add nothing to the economy or the well being of the citizenry, their bonuses alone are figured in millions. Undercontributing & vastly overpaid -- and someday soon someone able to do something about it may notice.
- Hi tech stock specialist Michael Murphy reacted to the punishment given all hi tech stocks when one company was a few points off its earnings estimate for a single quarter: "Wall Street's got it backwards. It's all psychology at this point." Another voice for the premise that economics is overruled by pr.

Wall Street's tunnel vision is ironic. Acts like these suggest it thinks stocks exist in a vacuum from society as a whole. But next day some minor rumor will throw the market into a tizzy -- like a single phrase in a speech by Federal Reserve chrm Greenspan did last year. No wonder USAToday's dartboard test (darts are thrown at a board containing company names to invest in) usually beats the million-dollar fund managers at picking winners.

#### HEALTHCARE REALITY: DOCTORS AVOID HAVING SURGERY & CURATIVE PROCEDURES DEPEND ON WHERE YOU LIVE

- A. The gang that airily proposes you & I go under the knife is far less likely to choose this option themselves. And who is better informed about healthcare choices than physicians? This seems symbolic of the whole chaotic healthcare scene today.
- Non-physicians are 80% more likely to have hemorrhoids or gall bladders removed
  - For tonsillectomy, hernia repair & hysterectomy the figure is 50%
  - Conclusion of the Swiss researchers: The more informed you are, the less likely you are to agree to elective surgery
  - Lawyers are close behind docs in surgery avoidance. Reason: docs don't push them too hard since they may sue if there are complications
- B. Evidence that treatment options like surgery are more a matter of salesmanship than science comes from the *Dartmouth Atlas of Healthcare 1998* (<http://www.aha.org>). It reports "striking patterns of variability" in treatment across the US "which simply can't be explained by differences in disease rates."
- Residents of Fort Collins, Colo, are 3 to 4 times more likely to have risky surgery for chronic back pain than those in Chicago or Miami
  - People in Bloomington, Ill, are 2 to 3 times more likely to undergo by-pass heart surgery as those in Grand Junction, Colo, or Albuquerque

Reason: "The more surgeons & hospital surgery rooms, the more surgery that was performed."

What does this imply for the ever-more-bitter cost & triage debate over healthcare? Even nations with national health programs don't escape this argument -- since dollars are being held tight everywhere.

#### GOV'T GRIDLOCK IS GOOD, NOT BAD

Said George Will to a Richmond (Va.) Better Business Bureau banquet: "Gridlock is not an American problem, it is an American achievement." The Founding Fathers feared gov't because of their experience with England, so they designed a political system not for efficiency but for safety.

- The problems citizens seem to be most exercised about, such as decline of the family, crime, coarsening of popular culture, deterioration of cities, don't submit easily, if at all, to cure by gov't, Will feels.
- Furthermore, tho the president can't have a cold without it making headlines, in fact power is switching back to Congress as the Constitution intended. And the 3<sup>rd</sup> partner in balancing power, the courts, remain a strong force.

Implication: Don't expect power brokers, opinion leaders of the people to rise to your aid because your cause is just. Overcoming possible gridlock takes too much energy. Now more than ever, grassroots pr campaigns are necessary to move both governmental & social action.

- One powerful case in point: 35,000 children die every day from hunger & malnutrition ... yet more than enough food is produced now to adequately feed the entire world population, reports Oxfam America.

If there's no outcry over that, don't expect 'em to scream for action on your issue.

#### THERE WE GO AGAIN WITH OUR SENSE OF A GROWING, LIVING TONGUE

To the chagrin of some prr readers, we flex the English language in unusual ways. One makes note of a recent occurrence: "Just received & gave a quick read to the 1/5 issue. Some good, thought-provoking topics. Still, I came up short by the word 'skepticity' (pg.4). My dictionary doesn't include this word, but does offer a reasonably traditional substitute (skepticism). Is this a neologism that bypassed me?" e-mails Paul Dickard (dpr, Ingersoll-Rand).

Answer: Oops, looks like we invented another word. Skepticism would've done the job well, without doubt. Still, there is something muscular & attention-getting about "skepticity."

#### ITEMS OF INTEREST TO PROFESSIONALS

"The great principle of public relations," finds Coors dpr Anita Russell, is this: "What most people want most is to be heard." Listening to customers, employees, neighbors, gov't officials, shareholders & all stakeholders either goes a long way toward solving the problem; or at least lets them know you're willing to seek a solution. The increasing use of ombudspersons, 800 numbers, on-line services & other immediate,