

Program started at Northern Illinois U in the late 80s. Binge drinking dropped 44%, say officials there. "You have to really saturate the market with a redundant message, the same way you'd sell Coca Cola or Miller Beer," says one.

3 other schools using the strategy report 20-30% declines. Prestigious Dartmouth, 10 colleges in Virginia & 4 in Kansas will try it this year. US Dept of Education is offering supporting funds.

**SOME STUDENTS ARE SKEPTICAL** "I'm not sure people care what the social norm is," one Dartmouth sophomore is reported as saying. But 48% of students there admit to bingeing in the 2 wks prior to a recent survey -- 66% among fraternity & sorority members.

What is the likelihood, based on theoretical research, these campaigns really work -- that messages do modify behavior?

- On one hand, they're **more preaching** -- to an audience that is particularly irritated by that
- On the other hand, they are virtually **inescapable reminders** of what the audience knows to be self-destructive behavior
- Altho a 1-way tactic, its subject is removing misperceived **peer pressure**
- If the premise is correct, the campaign should create direct **cognitive dissonance**
- They meet the test for rule #1 of the 4-step model for mass behavior change: a **massive coalition campaign** that leaves targets no place to turn for solace (pr 9/14/92 or copy from pr)

## WHO'S WHO IN PUBLIC RELATIONS

**APPOINTED.** Judy VanSlyke Turk as founding Dean, Com'n & Media Sciences, at Zayed U, a 1-yr old public women's university in Dubai, United Arab Emirates. After yr's leave of absence, will return to her deanship at U So.Car.

**HONORS.** Bob Heath (U Houston) receives Stephen Kaye Research Award from Institute for PR for top paper at '99 Int'l Interdisciplinary PR Research Conf. Kirk Hallahan (Colo State) & Shirley Serini (Ball State) win the other awards from the conf. IPR's Pathfinder Award, its highest honor, to Don Stacks (U Miami) for

original scholarly research which "has made a significant contribution to the body of knowledge & practice of pr."

**ELECTED.** Del Galloway (Husk Jennings Comms, Jacksonville) to PRSA's board, replacing Bob Stack, who declined the nomination. Mike Jackson (Dow Corning, Midland, MI) named Assembly delegate-at-large replacing Galloway.

**DIED.** Bill Dietrick, longtime PRSA leader from Richmond, Va, who spent most of his career as a counselor in his own firms, except for 10 yrs with Nat'l Tobacco Tax Council.

## DOES OPINION MOVE TOO FAST NOW TO BE CAPTURED IN RESEARCH ?

Researchers are beginning to discuss, quietly, the probability that events now move so fast it is not possible to gauge public opinion reliably -- at least not using traditional survey sampling/polling methods. Certainly not in the *actionable* mode needed for pr programs.

- While new, faster methodologies can work, as reported in pr over the past few years, old line researchers seem wedded to polls -- partly because the statistical calisthenics involved make them profitable to sell clients & safe to present to risk-averse colleagues or managers

Here are poll results from recent weeks on 2 key topics, to illustrate how difficult it is to discern where public opinion really lies:

**TRUST IN GOV'T** 80% of Americans believe gov't is controlled by special interests. And 90% feel congressional gridlock occurs because members are most interested in scoring political points, rather than governing, finds an April poll by Center on Policy Attitudes.

- **Report concludes democracy thwarted:** "Most Americans feel they are marginalized from the decisionmaking process, that elected officials neither pay attention to nor understand the public, and that most decisions gov't makes are not the ones a majority of Americans would make"

BUT a Gallup poll from June finds 50% have faith in the presidency & Supreme Court, with a 26% approval rating for Congress. Clearly, it depends on which questions are asked & how.

- **Fluctuation is rife:** highest rating ever for Congress (by Gallup, at least) was 58% in Feb '98 -- when a budget surplus was announced & the president was caught in l'affaire Lewinsky. That's a 32-point drop in just over a year. Low point was 18% in '92 amid the check-bouncing scandal
- For contrast, Index of Nat'l Civic Health puts trust in gov't at 38%. AND PRSA's Credibility Index found people are *not* skeptical & cynical. It gave these ratings to gov't figures: Supreme Court justice, 81.3; Governor, 66.8; US Senator, 64.2; Congressman, 64.2; Vice President, 60.2; President, 56.9; Cabinet member, 56.1; candidate, 53.1 -- and, not surprising, political party leader, 48.6. Mean on this scale is 61.5

**Lesson learned:** opinion changes overnight based on latest events, making strategic planning by practitioners extremely difficult. Some have stopped doing it for just this reason.



**CIVIC HEALTH**

Nat'l Com'n on Civic Renewal, chaired by Bill Bennett & Sam Nunn, reports civic health improving after a decade of declines. E.g. citizens' trust in other people is at 53%, up from 29% in '94. Divorce rate has fallen steadily.

- BUT Pew surveys find 67% say their own lives are better than those of their families in the 50s -- yet only 44% feel life in the US improved during that time. "Technological & material success is undercut by the sense that somehow we have lost our way morally"
- Battleground survey in June reports, by 51% to 36%, people feel US is headed down the "wrong track." Wirthlin found similarly in May, by 56% to 33%

**Lesson learned:** while these subjects greatly influence public moods, only specific, timely research directly with stakeholders can determine whether they have been affected -- on the topic in question.

**STATISTICS ARE OFTEN MISLEADING**

As vital as it is for pr to be research-based, the "art" side

of our behavioral science is also becoming more important.

- **Creativity** remains essential -- not just in use of language & in strategy or tactical design, but in cutting-edge areas like symbolic com'n. [On this point, the Pew study cited above is useful for ranking the most remembered events since the 50s -- which can provide touchstones for the persuasion technique of usurping trusted symbols, known as the Association Method of persuasion (see pr 8/24/92.) Copy of Pew study from pr]
- **Common sense** will never be outdated -- as shown by savvy researchers who apply the "feels right" test to data. Along those lines, Report of National Com'n on Civic Renewal offers cogent suggestions on community relations/social responsibility directions for practitioners that rises above the data of its Index on Civic Health (copy from pr)
- **Final word on misleading data:** While the S&P stock index gained a massive 28.6% last year, 60% of the 7200 US stocks fell in value! It's not the generality of a poll or index that matters -- but the specifics of your situation

**ADDITIONAL THOUGHTS ABOUT STRATEGIC FOCUSED PHILANTHROPY**

As this disciplined strategy becomes the standard -- as opposed to "doing good" by giving dollars, volunteers & in-kind donations all over the lot without considering benefits to the donor organization -- new wrinkles continue to be discovered.

For instance, here are 3 unexpected giving categories

1. **Keeping competitors out of important venues.** Sometimes it is strategic to make contributions in areas or on topics which are not in your usual focus purely to keep others from activity there.

This is particularly true in cases where their entry might give them the appearance of being on a par with you. Wal-Mart is adept at this tactic, generally giving relatively small sums with such fanfare that more generous donors appear to be second class.

Some, like the Interfaith Center on Corporate Responsibility, feel the company's policy is particularly hypocritical given its use of low-wage overseas suppliers, driving small retailers out of business & questionable environmental & inclusivity practices. The Ctr has filed 5 shareholder resolutions on these topics.

2. **Because key customers or stakeholders demand or expect it** -- or will applaud it. A basic tenet of strategic philanthropy is getting close to opinion leader networks.
3. **Keeping a percentage for unavoidable "bribe" gifts** -- the dinners you just have to buy tickets for, the Little League program you will be criticized for failing to support, the fire victims everyone is helping. There's a defensive side to strategy, too.

**Still the toughest issue** is that strategically inusportable category: "because managers or the CEO wants it." Their hobbyhorses are not strategy, but...

**SOME 1-WAY MESSAGE CAMPAIGNS CLAIMED TO IMPACT BEHAVIOR**

1. **Aggressive anti-smoking advertising, media & teaching efforts** in Oregon, California & Massachusetts are being credited with reducing smoking rates by the Center for Disease Control & Prevention. Part of the rationale is that rates continue to rise in states lacking such campaigns, notably Kentucky, which has the highest adult smoking rate.

With funds from the \$250 billion settlement with tobacco companies *supposed* to be used for such campaigns (many states are grabbing the money for other purposes), the effort could pick up steam.

CDCP notes, however, that measures like increased tobacco taxes are an integral element in states where smoking has declined.

2. **"Social norms approach" campaigns** are being tried by many colleges & universities to slow down campus alcohol usage. Students are bombarded with newspaper, tv & radio ads pointing out that heavy drinking is not the norm on campus -- tho many students perceive it to be.

That's the strategy: students are believed to overestimate how many of their peers drink, and the amount they drink, so if they realize this isn't true, they'll alter their own drinking behavior.

While it may not stop alcohol use altogether, it is expected to impact binge drinking (4 or 5 drinks at a sitting) -- the major cause of alcohol-related deaths & incidents on campuses.